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ABSTRACT

This book presents 11 case studies that demonstrate successful efforts to improve education through building new relationships between schools and communities. In addition to presenting the case studies, the book also contains an introductory chapter that discusses the potentials and pitfalls of local efforts at participatory democracy, as well as a final chapter that summarizes theoretical and practical lessons drawn from the case studies and from the experience of the Institute for Responsive Education. The individual chapters include the following: "Introduction"; "Pluralism Goes Public: How Lagunitas, California Did It"; "Parents and a Dream School"; "Fight for Community Schools in West Virginia"; "Learning in Louisville Is a Two-Way Street"; "Parents Plus Principal: Key to Successful Desegregation in Boston"; "School Community Advisory Councils: Los Angeles' Road Toward Citizen Involvement"; "The Lion and the Cricket: The Making of Militants in Crystal City, Texas"; "Indian Parents Strive for Community Control: The Story of Three Indian Schools"; "The Milwaukee Federation of Independent Schools"; "Alternatives in Public Schools: Minneapolis Experiment"; "Citizens Act to Change Schools"; and "Perspectives and Future Directions." (JG)

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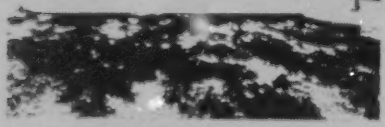

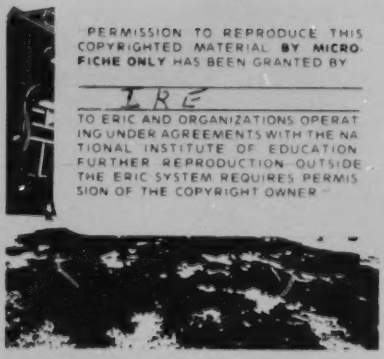

Edited by Don Davies
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The editor

Other I.R.E. Publications

Citizen Action in Education, quarterly journal of the Institute for Responsive Education. New models and ideas for citizen involvement in schools from Alaska to Florida are reported for citizens and school people wanting to increase citizen involvement in school decision making.
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Preface

Don Davies*

Many Americans are fed up with the "best and the brightest" making decisions for them about wars, taxes, zoning, hospitals, and schools. Many are frustrated with slow-moving, unresponsive bureaucracies that crowd the landscape. They are suspicious of politicians and professionals and experts. Some are retreating into apathy. But others are organizing with like-minded people to build healthier communities and institutions and to demonstrate that ordinary Americans can be self governing. They are banding together to try to make government and institutions more responsive, more accountable.

The schools are criticized from all sides today, and are the target of many citizen activists. Schools are everywhere; they are the largest and most expensive public institution we have. They touch the lives of nearly everyone at one time or another.

In the 1950's and 60's, expectations for what the schools could do shot sky high. Innovation and change were the watchwords. We became an "education society," and costs rose along with hopes.

Now, people are disappointed with the results and resent paying the bill. Most of the money for the public schools comes from local property taxes, property taxes already groaning under the burden of rising costs of other public services such as police and fire protection.

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The last half of the 1970's is likely to be a tense and trying time for the schools, a time of retrenchment and conflict. Many people are apathetic; many others antagonistic or hostile. But the picture isn't all grim. There are hopeful signs – more school people willing to join with parents and citizens in solving problems; new approaches to governing the schools giving a much larger voice to parents and citizens. Parent and citizen groups of many kinds are demonstrating positive contributions toward improving education. More variety and choices for parents and children about the kinds of education available are being developed.

Citizens and educators are recognizing that improvement in the schools and community support for education occurs only when schools and communities are open to each other – when the educational consumer (student, parent, and community member) has a strong, honest part in setting policy and making decisions.

This book is for those Americans who want to improve the schools through collaboration between educators and the communities they serve. It is for parents, teachers, students, administrators, school board members, and community leaders, published by the Institute for Responsive Education.

I founded the Institute in 1973 to advocate and assist citizen participation in educational decision making. My years in Washington as Deputy Commissioner in the U.S. Office of Education convinced me that lasting educational change needs support and roots – the roots of participation by the community. There I saw what happened to millions of dollars for innovation in education. Much of this money fed educators who were innovative until the dollars ran out. I was continually impressed by the lasting changes taking place where the community was closely involved in planning and monitoring programs.

My years in Washington also convinced me that the most important task facing the people of America is rebuilding their own competence and confidence in managing their own affairs and their own communities. Democracy means more than voting and consuming services; it also means participating in decision making. This kind of democracy is often slow and inefficient, but I believe that it is an essential part of a healthy society.

The message of this book is significant: parents, working with school people, can make a difference. Democratic participation is an important part of American life and can help improve schools.

The eleven case studies demonstrate successful efforts to improve education through building new relationships between schools and communities.

- In Louisville, Los Angeles, and rural Wayne County, West Virginia, school councils enable parents and community members to have a direct and continuing say in local school policy.
- In Minneapolis and a little town in northern California parents now choose the style and type of schooling they want for their children – from the freest to the most traditional.

• In Crystal City, Texas, a community organization used politics to force the schools to be more responsive to the needs and goals of the Chicano majority in the town.

• In one of the nation's most affluent suburbs, Hillsborough, California, parents play a major role in creating a private "dream school" for children with special talents.

• In Milwaukee, inner city black parents run remarkable educational programs on shoestrings in old parochial school buildings.

• On Indian reservations in New Mexico, Montana, and Wyoming, Indian children now attend schools staffed by and accountable to their own tribes.

• In Boston, New York City, Washington, and suburban Madison, Connecticut, private citizen organizations act as watchdogs, community information services, ombudsmen, and mobilizers of citizen action to improve schools.

• An elementary school principal in Boston is finding successful ways to involve parents in the desegregation process.

These places were selected from hundreds of examples by the staff of the Institute for Responsive Education. They are a small sample of a large-scale and growing national phenomenon: tens of thousands of parents and other community people are involved in new and significant ways in school affairs. Each of these success stories contains how-to-do-it ideas and suggestions for readers who are or who want to be engaged in similar activities in their own schools or communities.

In his introductory comments, Joseph Featherstone points to the potentials and some of the pitfalls of local efforts at participatory democracy, cautioning against oversimplification of the complex issues at stake. The final chapter summarizes theoretical and practical lessons drawn from the case studies and from the studies and experience of the Institute for Responsive Education.

The case for democratic participation is clear. Schools need change, the change that only school-community alliances bring. Evidence that democratic participation works comes at a strategic time — a time when Americans are wavering between activism and apathy, between cynicism and hope.

Introduction

Joseph Featherstone*

The obituaries written for many of the educational reforms of the 1960's are premature. Each of these essays shows the process by which the glittering abstractions about "participation" take concrete shape, the shape of school ventures involving parents with education.

Parent participation arises from two strong historic trends, trends not confined to education. One is the continuing expansion of the human service sectors of the economy – professionals helping people. More and more of the work of our society is in the service – often the public service – sectors: schools, hospitals, government.

The other trend is almost a predictable response to the first: as the services expand, consumers begin to organize to make them more responsive and accountable. Often the initial set of issues around which consumers organize involves what I call the pathological professionalism of many of our social services, which often seem designed to insulate professionals from the public rather than to provide decent services.

In education there is particular force to the demand for participation. Our political tradition mandates local lay control of the schools, and one characteristic mode of school reform has been citizens' movements. There are historic precedents for turning the schools back to the people whenever they lose their legitimacy – when they lose what the Chinese elegantly term "the mandate of heaven."

The failure of schools to educate the urban poor is not new. Nor is our sense of social crisis new. Both were woven into the fabric of our city schools in the nineteenth century. Richard Titmuss has said that the

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problem of social policy is what a society is willing to do for strangers. In American cities of the past, the problem of the stranger and his children was doubly complex, for the strangers were not only from a lower social class, but often from another race. When schools insulted and failed America's historic strangers, the strangers often fought back through local politics.

School wars in the nineteenth century created education arenas in which the hopes of the immigrant newcomers and fears of the natives clashed. Sometimes Yankee elites and reformers won the school wars. The centralized big city school systems whose rigidities plague us today are one such victory. Sometimes the immigrants and outsiders won, establishing ward and local neighborhood systems, for example, or by seizing city hall and the machinery of educational government. Schools were an important part of the mechanism by which America's outsiders fought, and gained, a relatively more inclusive culture.

From time to time the rules of the educational game got redrawn. New rules sometimes included new forms of citizen participation. These traditions ran so deep in the culture that they survived into the era of the centralized and bureaucratized school systems of the late 1960's.

The 1960's witnessed a drive for equality and new rights on the part of previously excluded and oppressed groups. An important, not wholly successful part of this push was a re-working of the idea of participation. Some of the impetus for this came from the civil rights movement, which played inventively back and forth between traditional and novel lower and working class modes of protest, and between traditional and novel middle class styles of action and reform on the part of concerned professionals and citizens. The result, as everybody knows, was an unprecedented national movement to reverse the status of blacks and minorities. Demands for participation were not usually the main items on the agenda of protest. They followed on the heels of other demands.

Unfairness in education was often the first step, because education is so central a part of what Gunnar Myrdal called the American Creed. Violations of the right to education were particularly important as an issue after the Brown decision, which in effect helped create a mass movement for legitimizing the educational grievances of southern Blacks. Educational grievances also began to include a demand for parent participation in schools. This was often a second or third order item on the protest agenda, something educational (and of course political) that people pushed for after other demands failed. It was in the aftermath of the signal failure to integrate the New York City schools, for example, that people around IS 201 began connecting the new talk of black power to education, and there was discussion of community controlled schools. (I remember Harlem parents linking their concerns to the struggle of the Child Development Group of Mississippi and its fight for parent-controlled early childhood education.)

The notion that alienation and powerlessness were central ills of our society, cured by participation, had surfaced among reformers dealing with problems like juvenile delinquency. It also came from middle class radicals like Paul Goodman, and the rising student movement, which was in part a clash between the expectations of affluent students and the rigidities of the institutions they encountered, and in part a response to the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war. These stirrings toward participation influenced the architects of President Johnson's poverty programs, partly in their pure and rather naively idealistic form, and partly because a number of the poverty warriers saw participation as a kind of end run around recalcitrant local state and city governments and educational authorities, a prerequisite to any real reform. Participation became one of the distinctive features of the war on poverty, at least until that war was killed off by the other, less metaphorical war in Vietnam. Head Start, the community action and model cities programs, and a number of other educational and social measures included some form of participation. The poverty programs were both a cause of the widespread demand for more participation and a symptom of it.

The hunger for more responsive institutions was never solely the creation of academics, radicals, students, and government officials. Participation as an ideal struck a much more general chord. Many of the people who migrated to the suburbs in the post-war period did so because – among other, no doubt weightier reasons – they were eager for human-sized scale, the possibilities of participation, and public services that were in some degree responsive to them. There was a good deal of nonsense talk about participation in the late 1960's. It was an age of rhetorical excess, and many of the demands in the name of participation took on the qualities of one of e.e. cummings' definitions of freedom: participation, too, can become a breakfast food. The notion that institutionalized professionalism had developed severe pathologies was sound, and as this volume shows, participation continues as a response to these pathologies.

Nowadays, the excesses of the 60's seem part of a remote past. A compromised form of community control came to New York City after tragic confrontations between teachers and the Black community. But slum schools were not transformed. As funds leaked away from poverty programs, bitter fights erupted among participants over dry bones. Participation was not a substitute for money, jobs, and housing.

Participatory ventures were not meaningless, however. The historian of the social and educational reforms of the late 1960's will write fascinating chapters on extraordinary social inventiveness involving participation. Head Start at its best is one of my favorite examples of how substantial amounts of parent participation can be reconciled with professionalism and educational standards. The money for Title I of President Johnson's 1965 ESEA bill did not redeem the education of poor kids; students of its impact tend to be dubious about its effects. Yet it helped out a good many distressed schools, and its

mandate for parent participation, however honored in the breech, is a clear influence on several recent participatory reforms chronicled in this volume.

The exercises in participation of the late 1960's were often a political education, a Tammany Hall for poor outsiders and previously apolitical middle class parents and professionals. Like the peace movement and recent political party reform, the poverty wars and the battles that ensued over them taught a good many people how to organize, hold meetings, run mimeograph machines, and make trouble. Local government in this country will probably never be the same. Perhaps for many of the poor and middle class, the message from the participatory reforms of the 1960's will be that it is very hard to run social service programs without involving the people they are supposed to be serving. This in itself is an achievement.

As the national wave of reform has ebbed, local agitation and change has continued in some places if not in others. For all the national climate of gloom and despair, many localities are living through their own educational reform eras. If the United States were a tightly-knit national society, then we could discuss education in national terms. But the emergence of national forces, institutions, and a national stage on which dramas are enacted and described by the media has blinded many of us to the fact that, educationally, we are still a profoundly regional and local society. The reader of this collection will be struck by the variety of forms of participation recorded here at different levels of educational government. Understanding the importance of local contexts and local actors is crucial. Perhaps the most important statement in the book is in Zeke Wigglesworth's thoughtful essay on southeast Minneapolis, where extraordinary efforts offer students and parents choices in education:

> *I can't say here that what will work at Marcy or the Free School or Pratt-Motley is going to work in other schools in Minneapolis, let alone the rest of the country. We are trying to see what can successfully take place here, in our area. I am not at all sure that what we have learned here is exportable. There is only one truth, I guess: what works for one group may not work for another. The community involvement and response of parents may not be proper anywhere else in the nation.*

The stories are all local. In some places budget cuts and racial tension have put an end to all reform. In others the aftermath of a reform era is a period of educational reaction. There is a dark side, as well as a democratic side to our Populist and participatory tradition, sometimes visible as a sour-bellied reaction against all experts, professionals, and outsiders — and the universal, cosmopolitan, or elite values they represent. Reading a book like this should not make us forget that the Boston School Committee in its opposition to integration, and the textbook protesters in Kanawha County are each exercises in local participation, too.

My own feelings about some of what's happening are mixed. It seems to me that many of the things parents and schools are trying to offer here are glimpses of new possibilities for social democracy and for progressive institutions that really serve their clients. At other times I'm bothered by the way people march into new situations armed with nostalgia for forms of lost democracy and community that may never have existed in this country.

I'm suspicious of the chronic tendency of American reform tradition to couch its goals in terms of loss and restoration of a better past. The valid criticisms of pathological professionalism in many of our social services are not made any more valid, it seems to me, if the critics are haunted by images of a happier past. On the contrary. When I look at the educational world pictured in *Schools Where Parents Make a Difference*, it looks to me to be a more open and pluralistic world than that of most of our educational past.

People are making more options for themselves and their children. The educational scene is somewhat more tolerant of diversity and variety, and has less of the monolithic quality of American education's traditional pursuit of what historian David Tyack calls "the one best system." This is not to say that the news is all good. The interesting work in the Louisville schools and in the Milwaukee Federation of Independent Schools takes place against a sombre background of urban decay. The mountaineers in West Virginia and the Chicanos in Crystal City are doing impressive things, but their struggle is desperate and victories in the schools are only a small part of it.

I think we have to learn to think of participation and democracy less simplistically and with less nostalgia for the past. The efforts of parents and citizens to make a difference in the various ways recounted here all take place within a complex, modern, professionalized social order made up of mass corporate institutions. It is a world whose institutions we may be able to make smaller, more humanly-scaled, more pluralistic and voluntaristic. I hope we can. But professions, bureaucracies, and large institutions are not likely to disappear. Demands for participation have to be squared with the realities of a huge and populous order that is not only national in scale, but international as well. The demands themselves often represent something genuinely missing from the existing order of things. Yet it may be that our older visions of democracy and participation — which are still turf-bound, localistic, and individualistic — need reworking.

In reworking them, we need to transcend slogans and see the educational order as an uneasy blend of democratic tradition, privilege, and aloof professionalism, fitfully accessible to people, in which citizens have a role to play, but in which the modern, impersonal realities of mass organization also coexist. For all our nostalgia for the simpler, more understandable institutions of the past, there may now be more citizen participation in education in many communities than ever before. (One thing our nostalgia misleads us about is the extent to which the older democratic localism of many places was in the hands of

local elites.)

The good effects of participation are obvious: the examples of parent involvement in this volume, the ease with which neighborhoods in many cities have blocked highways and renewal projects that would have bulldozed them in the Pharonic days of the likes of Robert Moses illustrate positive effects of participation. The drawbacks of an increasingly participatory order are also obvious, in education as well as in politics: the paralysis of many of our city governments is not only a matter of budget crises, but also a reflection of the fact that a system with more openings for participation is less and less geared to action. Fortunately for those of us interested in education, schools lend themselves to the possibilities of participation better than, say, sewage systems, or air traffic control.

Reading through these pieces, I have a sense that the participatory agenda of poor outsiders often has a different, less abstract and utopian character than the participatory strivings of the emancipated middle and professional classes. For groups like Indians on reservations where community control is an issue, or for the Chicanos trying to gain political power in Crystal City, educational issues are both real in themselves and ways of organizing hitherto unorganized people for political power. Educational demands open up new possibilities for jobs, leadership positions, and a sense among the group that change is possible. Poor and politically weak groups in such situations must constantly think in terms of the trade-offs: the advantages and disadvantages of organizing tactics that make gains but possibly cut them off from future coalitions with other groups, leaving them totally isolated. The whole separatist-integrationist dialectic between American education institutions and outsider groups is a much more complicated historical story than we realize, and it is reenacted in each generation.

The accounts of middle class participation here do not contain quite the same urgencies or dilemmas. The spread of new standards and concerns among educational consumers is striking. The higher standards parents now have for schools are probably an important byproduct of the extension of education. Diane Divoky's fascinating piece on the options offered parents by the Lagunitas, California, school system suggests a striking degree of sophistication in education matters, as well as an equally impressive tolerance of educational diversity.

The tolerance of diversity and the growing notion among teachers and parents that there is no one right pedagogy for all students is one of the really important after-effects of recent classroom reforms in many places. Its advantages, I think, outweigh the considerable disadvantages of packaged teaching approaches, with readily identifiable categories and slogans. A good first step is to think of three equally valid approaches to teaching instead of one, but that should be the beginning, not the end, of the story. It would be a pity if parents ever came to rest on the notion that the categories themselves do justice to

the variety of good practice. And one wonders what the Lagunitas teachers feel about being subsumed under these particular categories.

Local school politics is very much a reality, as these essays show. Both formal and informal, the varieties of participation suggested here seem healthy, and do not, I suspect, more than touch on the possibilities for more parent involvement in schools.

But those of us who favor more participation need to be clear on its limits. The chief limit, it seems to me, is that our older conceptions of local democracy need reworking; they are not adequate to build a national politic capable of exerting democratic control over education, let alone controlling the private corporations that dominate the country. A decisive limit on local citizen participation as a central focus for social change is that there has been a shift in scene of many major democratic issues from local to national politics.

None of the local school movements here link up with national issues. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It frees people to move on a local stage. But it circumscribes the stage in important ways. Local politics is still vital; it is especially important as an arena in which disputes over cultural values takes place. Yet the atrophy of many of the traditional democratic forms of education governance, such as school boards, is one reason why so many people — including many of the parents and professionals whose work is described here — are searching for alternatives.

The reasons for this decay are complex: the growing power of the states; the emergence of unaccountable national institutions of education, such as testing, accreditation, and curriculum design; and professionalization itself have contributed to the decay of traditional local democratic forms. National and regional economic forces, the power of entrenched local privilege, the patchwork of jurisdictions and their profound inequalities in tax base and status, and the accessibility of national politics to the discontented and oppressed, have all turned national politics into the main arena for most of the major democratic issues we face. Yet it is just here that older turf-bound visions of democracy and citizen participation just don't seem to fit very well. Movements like Common Cause and Ralph Nader's various crusades are brave efforts to explore new possibilities, but it is hard to argue that they have hit upon solid answers. The question is whether we must scrap the old ideals and start from scratch, or whether they can be reworked.

I think the best chance of reworking older ideals of participation is to think of them as a needed, often missing, fluid element in a complex and often over-rigid modern educational order. Any participatory forms we develop will have to mesh with an educational scene that, like an archeological dig, is a mixture of the old and enduring and the new. It is this sense of complexity that is lacking in much of the current quest for "accountability;" in such proposals, for example, as voucher schemes and community control. Both seem to me to be fairly simple political answers to problems that are complex blends of social,

economic, and political forces. Vouchers are exercises in nostalgia, attempting to substitute a vanishing free marker for the complex politics of education that now exists. Proposals for community control have very varied sources — in part they have been a rather despairing tactical response to the relative failure of school integration in the North; but in part they also attempt to restore vanished varieties of urban "community" by simply shrinking the size of the turf. Both vouchers and community control are responses to genuine needs that are not being met; but both are futile attempts to do away with the complex mixture of formal and informal politics that has emerged to deal with our society's education.

I don't know whether we are up to being as socially inventive as Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who had such a passion — at times such a genius — for building institutions. I'm more clear about what I'm against than what I'm for. What I'm against is our current habit of talking as though we can do without organizations, professions, and institutions. My sense of the matter is that what we misleadingly call the welfare state is in fact very badly organized and in need of more institutions to reach people and give them support. I'm also proposing that we attack rigid bureaucracy and excessive professionalism, but not professionalism itself, for some of the really good work I've seen in this country and others has been a result of the kind of support and autonomy that healthy educational professionalism ought to provide but so seldom does. And thus I propose thinking about the possibilities of participation within the context of an acceptance of the fact that we live in a world of professionals.

Thinking about participation in modern contexts, I finish this collection with a strong sense of at least two possibilities. (I'm sure there are more.) The first is coalitions between professionals and parents. I'm struck by the fact that the most promising ventures described here include school administrators in alliance with parents. Often enough the key figure is a good principal, a fact that New York City's community control movement understood very well. In a professionalized system, professionals will usually end up with a disproportionate amount of influence. Citizen groups are often essential for starting changes in rigid school systems, but unless they win allies among the professionals, the changes are unlikely to last or to be built on.

The challenge for parent and citizen groups, therefore, is to redirect the priorities and allegiances of the two key sets of practitioners in schools: principals and classroom teachers. What the politics of education badly lacks is coalitions of parents and practitioners. In some embattled school systems this idea seems laughable; that it is not in others is testified here.

A second promising path touched on by one essay in this volume offers another way to square participation with professionalism. It might be described as using the machinery of a kind of quasi-professionalism to overcome the pathological professionalism of school systems. Essentially, this is the sort of work Velma Adams describes

in her interesting piece on Boston's City-Wide Educational Coalition, the District of Columbia's Citizens for Better Public Education, the Queens Lay Advocate Service, and the Madison Educational Forum. These are groups that work professionally — up to professional standards, although often staffed by volunteers — to counter school bureaucracies and professionals. These and other similar groups in different cities inform the public, uncover hidden issues, keep the professionals honest and responsive, help with parents' complaints, defend students' rights, litigate, and so on, working against the school system's inherent tendencies toward inertia.

Even when staffed wholly by volunteers, they work on a professional basis. They have their counterparts in public service and citizen groups in such areas as law, medicine, and television. They are a kind of counter-profession designed to balance the power, secrecy, and rigidity of existing professions. Over the next decade or so, we will probably see a great variety of similar attempts on the part of citizens and professionals to set up such counter-weights. Their frequent adversary style will make our world even more contentious than it has been. They may also produce more variety, air holes, and mechanisms for redress for consumers of public services of all sorts, especially outsiders and bottom dogs. Such lay and often volunteer groups are, I believe, forerunners of the increased professionalization of our society: they combine older forms of citizen participation with the quasi-professionalization of reform itself. (Nor, of course, will professionalized reform be immune to the ailments of professionalism.)

Aside from parents (and of course, children), the people also neglected in our discussions of education are the classroom practitioners. These essays, by and large, are no exception. Parents need to understand that the pathological professionalism that exists in many of our schools is hurting practitioners too. It fails to give principals and teachers the mixture of support and autonomy they need. They have the worst of two demanding worlds: they are lonely in their work, yet they are constantly harassed by what the army calls chicken shit. Parents are cut off from schools, and their efforts to find out, to help, or to complain, are often seen as a source of further harassment.

Patterns of school reform have not helped. In the educational past, as in the present, reform movements have often widened the gulf between practitioners and parents. Top-down, general staff patterns of administrative reform are (rightly and wrongly) resisted by classroom practitioners, who are equally resistant to the sort of grass roots citizen reform that often looks from the classroom window like the educational equivalent of a lynch mob. Surely the patterns are self-defeating.

There is no mention in these essays of the teacher union movement, which is at a number of important turning points in its history. The shape the union movement takes may influence the possibilities of coalitions and bargains between the counter-poised groups of service professionals and consumers of services. Whether teachers will be

able to respond creatively to the needs prompting citizen and parent movements, and whether lay movements can come to understand the problems and legitimate concerns of the professionals is, of course, an open question.

Our reform history is not promising. Perhaps we can transcend it. My own feeling is that the more internally democratic – participatory, if you will – the unions are, and the more they can think in terms of alliances with parents and principals at the individual school level, the more promising the future will be.

Individual classrooms and individual schools are the ultimate locus of change: that is the level where one would most like to see an end to the traditional adversary relationships. That is also the level that is most difficult to reach in ways that help, rather than exacerbate matters. Over the next few years we will be finding out more about the possibilities of change at the school level. Prediction is, however, a mug's game. The only safe prediction is that a society ripe for possibilities for participation will continue to see many variations on all these themes, in many different communities.

CHAPTER 1
Pluralism Goes Public: How Lagunitas, California Did It

Diane Divoky*

In 1972 a Los Angeles family sold their suburban house, put their belongings into a van, and headed out to find a new place to live. They were weary of their hurry-up, join-up, buy-up life. They were weary of trying to convince their local school that their young daughter, although impetuous, shouldn't be written off as an unteachable discipline problem. They were worried that their son's teachers cared more about equipment than creativity, and more about order than learning. They were weary of being thought of as freaks for speaking up at PTA meetings. They wanted a place where the belief in caring about individual children and their families was still taken seriously. This family's search for a community compatible with their hopes ended in Lagunitas in the San Geronimo Valley, an exurban town just forty miles north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge where many other families had recently settled to escape city life.

The valley, folded in the hills of northern Marin County, brings all the old dreams of California back to life. The hillsides are lush green, even in January. Roses bloom wild in October. The sun plays over eucalyptus and fir trees fringing the slopes, and the air breathes clean-washed. The single highway that runs through the community

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allows views of a few farms, and only smoke wisping into the winter air tells that homes are hidden away on winding back roads.

The people in the valley value their privacy; they also value their independence of mind. For a long time the community has embraced a spectrum of political views and lifestyles — conservative oldtimers, free-living artists, commuters willing to drive an extra fifteen minutes beyond the busy suburbs. The balance of conservative and liberal elements in the community shifted somewhat, however, in the late sixties when San Geronimo became a haven for a good-sized colony of artisans and counter-culturists fleeing city life.

Nevertheless, the rule of live-and-let-live could have continued to operate nicely had it not been for the 500-student, K-8 Lagunitas School District, the unincorporated town's only vehicle for citizen involvement in a community that takes education seriously. American schools are supposed to run by consensus, but consensus didn't work in Lagunitas. Very real differences in educational philosophy and methods did separate the various segments of the community. As a local newspaper noted, the school board tried to "preserve peace by compromises that pleased neither group." The rights were mad, and the lefts were mad, and the middles muddled along.

The hostility and suspicion that surrounded the late 1960's fight over schooling began to tear apart the Lagunitas community — otherwise friendly neighbors simply stopped talking to each other. As turmoil wracked the district, it went through four superintendents in three years. Then, in 1971, Sandra Dorward, a teacher backed by some interested parents, got permission from the school board to try a single open classroom where the needs and interests of students, in this case volunteer primary-grade students, would be the focus of school activity. The experiment went well, but it was still a test — with critical observers checking every move. That winter, in a bitterly fought "left-right" school board election, the crisis came. Richard Sloan — parent, peace activist, and carpenter — outraged the conservatives by running for and winning a seat on the board. He immediately urged a vast expansion of the open classroom concept. As the open classroom proponents rallied to present their program to the school board, the conservatives decided to play the same game, and cooked up their own counter program, one far more structured than the existing classroom approach.

Then, with the conservatives, radicals, and liberals sitting there at the board meeting, and a compromise clearly impossible, the idea of pluralism seemed to emerge, as if from necessity. "Why not try all three kinds of education in our system, and let parents choose the program they want?" someone suggested. The idea was so logical that at first it seemed absurd, and it met some resistance and suspicion because Sloan was one of its strongest supporters. But the school board took a chance, sent out a questionnaire to all parents describing the three programs, got a whopping 90 percent response, and found substantial support for each of the three programs.

After that lots of planning and work went into preparation for the next fall, when Lagunitas became the first known public system in the country to offer three co-existing programs based on parental choice. In some ways the system's set-up was already well-suited for the three-way program. This district buses all its children to school, so there was no problem of providing special bus service for respective programs. (In Cupertino, a large suburban Bay Area elementary district, a 1973 parents' initiative for a conservative program suffered a setback when the school board said that it would provide a traditional alternative, but it would not provide transportation to get children to the program sites.) Lagunitas' school building is located on two separate sites within easy walking distance of one another, so the division into different programs did not lead to isolating any groups of students. In addition, a traditional Spanish-style classroom building fit the traditional program and one five-section unit was perfect for the open classroom.

Matching staff and programs could have been a problem, but most teachers found their niche, and five who didn't took leaves of absence. Their departure allowed parents and professionals to screen and hire four new teachers for the open program, and another for the traditional plan. The following year, one of the teachers on leave returned to the traditional program, and another to the existing program.

Perhaps most important of all, the community tried out its pluralistic approach without getting overly impressed with its own efforts and inviting scores of outsiders to help them do what they were already doing. Although a relatively low-budget system, it didn't seek special federal or state funds. It shunned publicity; it didn't call in any researchers to document or evaluate progress. (The University of Massachusetts School of Education did learn of the project, and has sent intern teachers — at a minimal cost of $2,000 annually to the district for a coordinator — each semester since the project began.)

The best symbol of the district's no-fuss style is superintendent Harry Roche, a former teacher and tennis pro, who has midwifed the experiment through its first two years and earned the unqualified praise of all constituents. People describe him as sensitive, down-to-earth, always willing to listen and help. Roche is not only superintendent; he's also principal and director of the district's special services. In fact, he's the only person who passes as an administrator in the system. As the gym teacher in his sport shirt and windbreaker, chain smoking, answering the phone; "How ya doin'?", Roche manages to oversee and coordinate the programs, keep an intricate bus schedule flowing, chat with the custodian about floor-cleaning problems, and give great chunks of time to individual parents and kids. He appears not to have worried much about the long-range implications of what's happening in his system, and does not see himself as some kind of major innovator — particularly refreshing qualities in a superintendent.

The district's low-key approach, in the wake of the chaos leading up to the pluralistic experiment, paid off. The first day of school in the

fall of 1972 was a landmark in the valley's history. "It was beautiful," one observer noted. "The straights and the long hairs, the liberals, conservatives and middle-of-the-roaders all showed up, kids in tow, bowing and nodding as if they were attending a Sunday school picnic high on grass. You couldn't believe it." Although each program has gone through its own special trials over the past two years, the harmony is still there. And each of the three programs has grown stronger and more confident that its philosophy can be realized in the classroom.

The traditional ABC program is more arresting than the other two because it is a kind of schooling that is not quite the rage in this nation anymore. Muriel Dillard's combined 4-5-6 grade classroom is something out of a time-warp, circa 1945. The song book on the battered piano is open to *The Star-Spangled Banner.* A globe, encyclopedias and a rock collection are on the windowsill, and the walls carry a music-made-easy chart, maps and murky prints of the *Mona Lisa, Blue Boy* and *Pinky.* Student heads bend over orderly desks; student attention is focused on exercises in grammar and penmanship workbooks. On the blackboard, in proper teacher script, is the daily schedule: 8:30 – Flag Song, Attendance, News. 9:00 – U.S. Geography and Climate. 9:30 – Math. 10:10 – Physical Education. 10:50 – Language and Reading. 11:20 – Handwriting. 11:35 – Spelling, and on through the day.

Ms. Dillard, very much a lady in a dress and pearls, is also very much in charge. She interrupts a workbook drill to administer a surprise test. The apprehension in the room grows as the questions begin: "When do you expect to find short vowel sounds in a word?" "Consonant blends are two or three consonants that are put together, and you get a new sound. There are seven that begin words. How many can you name?"

A chorus of moans, sighs and questions arises: "Does the answer have to begin, 'We expect to find short vowel sounds in a word when . . .'?" It does, says Dillard. The teacher goes to the door to answer a knock, and a dozen heads are put together to share answers.

A boy explains the system under which students function in Dillard's class. "You choose a topic, like presidents or holidays or insects or world geography, and name 10 facts about the topic. Then you choose 10 facts about each of those 10 facts, and memorize them, or 100 facts about the one thing, or 20 facts about five things." The point of learning all the "facts" and repeating them: "It counts on your report card."

Next door, Mary Johnson's second and third grade ABC class has the same basic objectives but runs on a different frequency. Johnson, a young woman with soft blond hair and huge blue eyes, looks all cotton candy. She isn't. Students wait in line to have her check their papers and be drilled: "What's nine times five? Nine times seven? Nine times three?" It is a very serious business, although occasionally the teacher has to stifle a smile.

At their desks children work intently on penmanship, the pencil tracing the capital "Q" over and over again. One occasionally lets off excess energy by punching a neighbor or wandering around the room. The room is decorated with compositions, multiplication-table charts and posters pushing courtesy. Behind their notebooks, two boys trade baseball cards. A student whispers to a visitor: "I only have 40 pages to go in my workbook, and then I get another workbook." A girl moves to an easel and Johnson reminds her softly: "Ellen, you cannot paint until you finish your math." A boy who doesn't listen to similar soft advice gets put in his place; "Rusty, dear, that's the end. Go to the office for five minutes."

The teacher explains that those of her students — whether second or third graders — who read under 2.3 level must go to watch "The Electric Company." "Some of them hate it, and it's a real punishment," she smiles.

Mary Johnson was new to the district in 1972, hired specifically for the ABC program. "I really like knowing what the parents want and their knowing what I believe in," she said. "There's a lot of feedback from parents. At the beginning of the year I asked them to describe the physical, mental and emotional strengths and weaknesses of their children, their long- and short-range goals for them, and what they expected of me as a teacher. And we use parent-teacher conferences to build on that foundation."

Although the essence of the program is a teacher-controlled, self-contained classroom, its practitioners use all the outside support they can get, including a state-funded reading specialist, student teachers, a librarian and counselor, and a psychologist on call.

Parents seem well satisfied. "In first, second and third grade, my boy was the kind who completed his work but never got involved or volunteered for anything," a mother said. "He did what was expected — nothing more — and he was too slow in doing his work. On top of that, he was shy, which teachers interpreted as a lack of caring. In the ABC program, he's doing fine academically, and he is much more outgoing. All my sons are the kind who need to be under a little pressure to do their best work, and I just wish the three older ones had had a chance to be in this program."

Another mother explains that she and her husband had been afraid that their daughter would never follow them to the University of California. "Her teacher kept saying she was fine and cooperative, but she didn't seem much interested in school, and when we discovered her achievement score had been going down for a couple of years, and no one at school had been concerned, we were shocked. She's a person who needs to be kept moving, and she blossomed in this program. For the first time she really loves school."

Many residents feared that the middle-of-the-road "existing program" would not develop enough of its own character, but would simply be a dumping ground for children whose parents were turned off by either extreme. This hasn't happened, partly because of the strength

of the teachers in the program. Academics Plus, as the program was named in its second year, looks like the best of the flexible, "modern" programs seen in suburban districts. In a nicely decorated, comfortable primary classroom in a "pod," students work individually and in groups at clusters of tables. The teacher has no desk, but moves from group to group. Painting and clay-modeling projects spill over from a sink near the center of the room. The room is busy with easels, tape recorders, overhead projectors, plants, drawings of dinosaurs and ghosts and whales, student-made burlap appliques on one wall, great butcher-paper lists of action words and describing words and "living" and "non-living" things on others. A paper strip printed with the numbers '1' to '200' winds its way discreetly along the edges of blackboards and up and down walls.

The Academic Plus program is ungraded, has an offering of student electives — drama, ceramics, woodworking, film and cartoon making — and incorporates familiar elements of other good elementary schools: teams of teachers working together at the primary school level, specialized reading sessions, a strong use of the library, a fulltime teaching coordinator for the upper grades, and a raft of special services.

Although curriculum materials and methods are varied, each teacher has a clear handle on specific goals in a wide range of subject areas. The atmosphere in the program is relaxed but not freaky, controlled but not tense — the kind of milieu that a majority of middle-class parents might choose. And that's just what's happened in Lagunitas, where the largest number of parents continue to elect it for their youngsters.

The open classroom is really an open school, a wide-open environment in which children — kindergartners through sixth graders — parents and teachers come together to share experiences. "So much of open education is: 'What do you want to read, this, this, or this'?" teacher Sandra Dorward said. "But that's not it. For us, it's got to be 'What do you want to read? This, this, this, or nothing'." As the program planners began with few preconceptions about how children learn best, and because there's no blueprint for this kind of school, the amount of time, energy, and words that have gone into its shaping and reshaping has been enormous. From the first the staff knew that such an open-ended program would require a lower adult-child ratio than the district could provide, and as a result, the participation of regular parent volunteers would be necessary for the project to work at all. They also built in some grouping by age, so that younger and older children would have some time all their own. And since teachers and parents were at least as interested in the emotional life learning as in academic skills, they set up a daily Magic Circle time, and an environment that tolerates a great deal of individuality. "If children are interested in acting out or lashing out, they have every opportunity to do so," a staff member said. "On the other hand, we're not set up for play therapy. As we go along, we pull back on some things, but there's

more freedom in others."

But the search for finding the elusive ways in which a child grows to enjoy learning, becomes sensitive to others, and accepts herself or himself in the academic and social world goes on continually. And because the program depends so heavily on the initiative and interest of the people involved and their ability to make the right decisions, each day has a special capacity for success or failure.

On a good day, everything hums and clicks. Curly-haired teacher, Mario LaMorte, helps three youngsters with multiplication exercises in the math center, and a girl works with a hand-crafted abacus. Materials abound — weighing scales; a matrix chart on the wall; and games — quizmo, club dominoes, popper numbers, Score Four. And a worksheet on measuring ("The pleasure of measure is in measuring me!") keeps three boys busy estimating the length of their arms, legs, and widest smiles, and then checking their guesses against the real measurements.

Nearby two chess games move rapidly, while three younger students play a card match-up game. Around a corner four little girls dress dolls and act out a fantasy about going to dinner, and a fifth works with measures at a corn meal bin. In a science corner, a woman teacher and four boys study deer bones, comparing them to diagrams in a book. X-rays of human bones make a wall display. A mother helps boys wire bulbs and batteries.

Teacher Beth Williams and a tough, freckle-faced boy work on a week's schedule of activities for him. His play comes out this way: "This week's expectations. Outside: Play soccer, Relay races, Football. Inside: Large blocks. One math game, Friday. One math puzzle, Wednesday. One language game, Monday and Wednesday. Science — study about bones."

In the language area, students have drawn and described their favorite modes of transportation: horses, submarines with periscopes, rockets to Mars, sailboats, putt-putt cars "with an injector seat like James Bond's that goes 160 miles an hour." Comic books do a thriving business in a reading corner. A board display invites students to "finish this story" about a "lily-livered monster." Issues of a student-written and produced newspaper, "Right-On News", carry an impassioned editorial about cruelty to animals in dog pounds ("How would you like it if a dog looked around for stray humans, then put them in jail?"), ads for free cats and two-cent coloring books, and sports items about a school football game ("It seemed like a close game, but we'll never know who won, as no one kept score.").

In a Noisy Game Area, five kids watch "The Electric Company," a boy does a word puzzle, and a group of adults and children play Probe. Crafts are a strong element: sewing, knitting, batiking, quilting, and appliqueing are all in progress. A pig-tailed mother teaches young weavers to work with carders, a Navajo spindle, and a loom; her baby rests quietly on a rug nearby. A substitute teacher breast feeds her infant as she moves about helping students with projects.

The second year of the open classroom program has brought some changes: the hiring of a half-time parent coordinator, and some limitations on the "open door policy" which formerly allowed children to go outdoors at any time. ("We don't have enough support people in here to also put people outside to supervise all the time," a staff member said.) The staff has also learned how to protect its sanity in spite of the continual mental and physical drain caused by running such a program. "When one of us goes over the brink, the others pull him back" a staff member notes. To develop the best possible interaction in spite of the odds, the staff meets once a week with a group leader from a local community mental health organization. "And we've made a collective decision to throw each other out the door in the afternoon," a teacher added, "because last year we never left for home before six and spent our weekends here, too."

There are subtle keys to the style of the program. The school counselor makes home visits. In the storeroom that also serves as a staff coffee room, the talk is nothing like the worn, complaining comments about troublemaking kids and dumb classes heard in most teacher rooms. Teachers and parents share curriculum ideas, positive ideas about kids ("You know, I figured out this morning that she doesn't really understand the offensive role."), and insights into parents ("You know Sarah's father. I think he has a lot of good thoughts but is afraid to speak up."). Even at a time of low morale, when the program looks ragged as a result of poor parent participation, the staff can joke. "We need five to seven parents a day, but since Christmas our numbers have dropped," Dorward explains. "We assume it's a temporary phenomenon, and we're waiting for a new blossoming of collective responsibility. In the meantime, we're telling them we feel betrayed." The comments that volunteer parents put in the daily log show the openness of communication between staff and families: "I would like to see some older boys *sat on.*" "I went to the woods with Barbara to retrieve a bird house . . . Spending a whole day with a child not one's own is a good experience." "The kids seem to be growing happier, more verbal, less hostile, more open. I think that the idea that children need an 'angry-sad' activity is reinforced by this." "I truly enjoy coming. It helps me a lot with Eleska at home."

Lagunitas has, at least for the time being, made its peace, and in doing so is demonstrating three very good ways to go to school. In choosing programs for their children, parents are gaining insights into themselves and their children. Many parents have selected one program for one child, a different one for another — based on individual needs and styles. Sometimes they're finding that what they initially chose is not in the child's best interest. A volunteer mother in the open classroom program who is totally committed to its philosophy recently transferred her son to Academics Plus. "He was in the open program for two months," she said, "and he didn't enjoy it at all. He said, 'I don't care for this kind of thing. I like to be told what I'm going to do.' So we agreed that he'd try it, and he loves it."

And everyone is learning how unity in diversity really works. A father who led the move for the traditional ABC program explained: "I'm telling my little daughter that there's nothing bad about the other methods. They're just different." And when the ABC program needed an additional teacher, the open classroom people went to the school board to help them fight for it. "We know very well that if they don't make it, we're dead," an open classroom teacher and parent said. "Our survival depends on their survival. We have to support each other."

CHAPTER 2
Parents and a "Dream School"

James Benét*

"I don't feel that I'm competing with the teacher any longer. For the first time I feel that I'm contributing to the education of my child."

This comment by a mother at Nueva School in Hillsborough, California, like other similar remarks a visitor quickly collects, seems at first puzzling. While Nueva is an unusual school, it doesn't put a major emphasis on parent participation.

The school was established in 1965 for children of high potential who the founders felt were being poorly served by existing schools. From the first its character has been formed by professional educators. Its organization structure follows traditional lines — a board of trustees, a professional director, a professional teaching staff, and parents as volunteer helpers. Yet the parents of Nueva pupils express intense feelings that they are important and that their contributions are valuable. They point to a promise in the school brochure: "This is not a school that keeps children in and parents out."

Nueva Day School and Learning Center, the school's full name, was established by Norman and Karen Stone from their belief in the need for a program for gifted children. Existing programs for the gifted, they concluded after investigation, either accelerate children beyond their usual grade level, often causing them difficulties in social development, or direct children to do more of the same thing — twenty

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problems instead of the next child's ten — resulting in boredom.

Stone, the son of Chicago insurance magnate W. Clement Stone, had the resources to establish the school. He and his wife solicited distinguished professional advice. Today the chairman of the school's board is O. Meredith Wilson, former president of the Universities of Oregon and Minnesota.

The Stones created what to many parents must seem like the school of their dreams. It is a bustling, lively place decorated with bright posters. The children, intent on their activities, hardly notice a visitor or two. The school is deliberately small with about 150 students, from four-year-olds in pre-kindergarten to sixth graders. The present director, Jim Olivero, is an eloquent, energetic young man who served formerly as the director of the Southwest Regional Laboratory, funded by the U.S. Office of Education. The carefully chosen staff includes distinguished teachers. For example, Mary Laycock the mathematics teacher, formerly supervised the mathematics program for the schools of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and produced a mathematics source book aimed at teaching teachers "how to make math exciting" and several sets of teaching materials. Recently retired kindergarten teacher Leonore Wilson spent most of her life teaching five-year-olds and wrote a book on kindergarten curriculum. To encourage and assist such efforts by the staff, and to spread their work, the school created a "Learning Center" which publishes these books and materials as well as papers and collections of articles by Olivero and others. "The Learning Center is a research and development center," Olivero says, "but so far it has been mostly development. We intend to get research going as soon as we can."

The school's teaching methods, expressed in plans worked out by the teachers, are based on an explicit statement of the school's philosophy which parents and pupils helped write several years ago. "A school should be a place where a child learns at his own pace in ways that are meaningful to him," the statement declares, "a place where the child is free to learn what he wants to know as well as those things we want him to know, a place which integrates affective and cognitive learning (we do not think without feeling nor feel without thinking), and a place that is democratic. The success of the democratic process depends on the individual taking responsibility for his actions and decisions. The child must be given the opportunity to assume responsibility so that he becomes aware and confident."

Each school year starts with a four- or five-day retreat for teachers in which careful plans are drawn for translating the school philosophy into school activity. One plan drawn in the fall of 1973 calls for teachers "to help children develop resolute ideas of their own about what they should learn," while at the same time the teacher should also be "the guide, the leader, the facilitator, the mediator, the influencer, the learner." Teachers keep elaborate records, including accounts of each child's achievement in cognitive skills, records of significant behaviors related to social and emotional development, work con-

tracts through which children learn to decide on and take responsibility for their own program, and folders of their actual work.

Such careful planning and thoughtfulness has led to a clear educational structure. "Nueva is not a free school," says Olivero, "but it's not conventional, either." Pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first grade are self-contained separate classes. "We believe that at this age level the children should not have to cope intensively with a large number of adults," the school's statement of purpose says. "We assume that four-year-olds have to be the center of attention," explains associate director and science specialist Del Alberti. "They're in an 'I-me' phase, and we may as well accept it. When they're five, they're ready to begin group experiences, and sixes are beginning academic work so that we no longer emphasize so much the social skills that they'll have acquired by this time."

Second and third grades also start the year as separate classes in each end of one big room, and at some time during the year, usually about Christmas, the classes merge by linking and then mingling their activities. Above this level students are non-graded and referred to not as fourth, fifth, and sixth grades but simply as upper elementary. Now they are working in a thoroughly informal classroom with individual programs.

"Of course," says Alberti, "in some places that means that kids are all doing the same thing but doing it by themselves instead of doing it together. Since we try to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual, we have to challenge the idea that 'all kids must have this' or 'all kids must have that.' "

Attention to individual instruction is the cherished hope of many parents for their children. Nueva maintains this program without prohibitive expense, while still paying teacher salaries comparable to those in public schools, through a broad use of teacher aides, parent volunteers, and student teachers, and by using pupils themselves as teachers. Director Olivero has written extensively on using educational manpower economically, and at Nueva he puts his proposals into practice.

Some of the school's policies may certainly be regarded as experimental, but its attitude is, as Olivero likes to say, a 'hard-nosed' one. Thus, while much of the curriculum material has been produced by the school and the learning center, specific objectivies have been established for achievement in math, science, music, language arts, and physical education. Standard diagnostic tests ascertain each child's progress, and these, of course, are also tests of the curricular materials. One area in which Olivero is still dissatisfied is that of social science; he has not yet seen a commercially produced program that he thinks satisfactory, he says, and he sees this as a major problem.

For staff members not familiar with individualized instruction schemes, the school has produced its own training program, written by second grade teacher Roberta Williams. The course offerings, too, may strike many parents as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Funda-

mentally, Olivero says, Nueva divides its curriculum into three parts. First come the "survival skills" that a child will always need; those are the three R's plus a fourth R — "relationships" or self-knowledge. Next is the school's requirement that every child "taste the spinach," by giving a fair trial to learning activities offered by the teacher, which the pupil is free to reject after a short experience. And finally, there is a dazzling array of electives that has included ballet, organic gardening, lasers, tropical fish, and aviation. All children participate in art, music, and dramatic performances; intensive musical study under concert artists is available for the particularly gifted.

One day about mid-year, teacher George Mason — watching over thirty-six second and third grade pupils with the help of two teacher aides and a parent volunteer — pointed to a large wallboard. "This shows who is working on contract — about four-fifths of the children at this point in the year — and who is still on a work-record basis. The child shifts over when ready to take the responsibility, and then we write a new contract once a week.

"I've never before had the freedom to give the children responsibility," says Mr. Mason. "Principals usually lack the confidence to allow their teachers to do it, because they're afraid of pressure from parents. Most parents don't want education changed from the way they were educated."

Such parents are not likely candidates for the Nueva school. In fact, one of the first steps in the admission process is to bring the prospective pupil's parents to the school for a visit "to determine," as the school puts it gracefully "if the school's philosophy is consistent with the lifestyle of the family." Nueva concedes that its way of education is not everyone's way, and it screens out parents who are unaccepting of it. "We say to parents who differ, that's your prerogative, but that's not where we are," director Jim Olivero comments.

The parents who survive the screening are presumably those most susceptible to Nueva's appeal. They are informed from the start that the school tries to establish as few rules as possible in the belief that there will then be fewer to enforce, and that discipline is rarely needed when children are active and busy. They will have accepted infrequent homework assignments, although children sometimes decide to work at home to attain their own goals. They understand that the school doesn't use traditional grading systems or report cards, although student growth is measured by specific means and teachers make regular reports on student progress using the school's own "student profile." And they will have heard about the school's view that more is known about academic learning than about the equally important problems of helping children know themselves and improve their self-esteem.

To cap its collection of dazzling facets, the school recently moved into a wealthy San Francisco suburb, Hillsborough, known throughout the area as the home of many of northern California's social and business leaders. There it occupies a big Italianate villa, "Sky Farm," perched

on a wooded hillside overlooking the bay. Its big, high ceilinged rooms make superbly spacious, light, and airy classrooms, and it is surrounded by acres of woodlands, with spaces for parking and playgrounds and possibilities for long walks on secluded trails.

"Most people think we're an isolated, Shangri-La school," Olivero concedes ruefully.

Finally, the enthusiastic parent may feel that — at least symbolically — Nueva is a parent-controlled school, since the Stones are, after all, parents of three of its graduates, with one child still enrolled. Both of the founders still sit as members of the board of directors, serving as vice president and secretary. And they are active in school affairs.

Karen Stone teaches a course called "self-sciencing." This course, an elective for children above the first-grade, was developed at the University of Massachusetts, and includes such areas as self-esteem, motivation, problem-solving, and goal-setting. It puts into practice one of the principal objectives of the founders, which is to emphasize social development and self-knowledge. While the Stones were considering their plans, and years before the school was opened, they met with a number of Nobel prize winners to discuss the sort of schooling that gifted children need. The Nobel laureates all told them that it is important that the children learn to live comfortably both with themselves and with others.

In spite of the anxieties and controversies often aroused in parents by courses directed toward candid exploration of emotions, "self-sciencing" is fully accepted at Nueva. "I think it is because Karen is a quiet, warm, trustworthy person," one mother explained. "I know only one parent who isn't enthusiastic about the course, and she's merely indifferent to it. Most of us think it is one of the big plusses of the school, and probably will stand the children in better stead when they move on than anything else they have learned here."

In this instance and others, Nueva parents know, the Stones — the first of the school's parents — have set the course that its skilled professionals follow. But the school genuinely encourages parents to be actively involved, and these parents are clearly taking a hand in shaping the school.

Nearly half of the school's 120 families take advantage of the opportunity to reduce their tuition by contributing work for the school. Each year, $45,000 is set aside to allow reduced tuition through work agreements with parents. These parents save a substantial proportion of the regular tuition of $1150 for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and $1700 at the higher levels. A few parents serve as classroom assistants two days a week, but most of the work is housekeeping such as washing windows, waxing floors, painting walls, driving busses, assisting in the library, and answering telephone calls.

Many parents continue these chores even after completing the required number of hours for the tuition waiver. And about a dozen participate without asking for any compensation.

Even if they are not involved in such work, the school welcomes parents at any time. They are encouraged to visit classes as an expression to their child of their interest in the child's work. They are encouraged to talk with teachers and the director at any time about the child's progress, and not only at the regular reporting periods of mid-year and the end of the school year.

Parents often teach elective courses. In early 1975 the upper elementary grades received a week and a half program of "mini-courses," mostly parent-taught. They included aspects of history and music, beginning German and German culture, Israeli culture, gardening, nutrition, and golf.

Some parents have been students along with their children in evening classes. One evening course taught telescope construction, and another in conversational Spanish resulted in a two-week family trip to Guadalajara.

The "Nueva community" includes the parents, and future planning is directed at finding more ways to involve them. The volunteer aide program will be expanded, more parent committees will be formed for specific undertakings, and concerts are being arranged. One winter weekend, Nueva parents were invited to a workshop on "future study," conducted at the school by a visiting specialist, Louis M. Savary of the Institute for Consciousness and Music. The workshop was free for them, but other participants paid a fee of $50.

Parent meetings are held in the evening, several times a year, whenever the staff thinks they are needed. Attendance is better than 80 percent.

Such activities, of course, may be regarded as ways of making parents into "Nuevans." But the activities also give interested parents their opportunity to participate in the definition of "Nuevan," and numerous other openings for influence even in the area of curriculum. The school program specifically aims to develop not only teacher-designed and student-designed courses, but parent-designed courses too. The school tries to provide any special activity for a child that a parent may wish. The staff asks that parents tell the staff what is being done well, what needs improvement, and "what we are not doing that we really need to work on." Olivero comments, "Perhaps our best outside evaluators are our parents and children. It appears that opportunity for parental involvement is limited only by the amount of time and effort a parent is willing and able to commit.

Moreover, in spite of the screening process, the parent group is genuinely diverse in important ways. The school is committed to seeking high-potential students of all socio-economic and ethnic strata, a policy which has produced harsh criticism from the wealthy and conservative community that surrounds it. And although the school looks for exceptionally able pupils, its definition of the type is broad — broad enough to accept children who would not meet, for instance, the rigid test of the California public schools for the "gifted," an IQ of 132 or higher. "Even if a test could assess intelligence accurately," Olivero

comments skeptically, "we think such a criterion ignores other areas of high potential such as music, leadership ability, creativity, or physical talent." Many of the children might best be rated as "bright normal," he says, and the principal consideration used to assess a child's suitability is that the child should not find the school excessively demanding, and, therefore, a punishing and unhappy experience. Within this broad limitation, he says, the school seeks a diverse community.

About forty percent of the children receive some form of financial assistance and there would be more if the school were able to raise more scholarship funds. Students are drawn from a fairly large geographical area, from San Francisco on the north to Palo Alto on the south, a distance of about thirty miles. This has produced genuine socio-economic diversity.

The Nueva children, not surprisingly, are generally highly verbal. Physical education specialist Peter Paulay speaks with some awe of the young pupil who persuaded him that he was too busy with other interests in school to spend time on games. "He said he knew that he had to get exercise and develop himself physically, Paulay says, "but he said he could do that by riding his bike to school and mountaineering on weekends. He was so reasonable that I had to agree with him."

Parents participating in the school through this sort of child — who is carefully encouraged at Nueva to share in program development and to express his concerns and interests — have an additional means of influencing it.

In some ways parent impact has been measurable and clear. For example, the staff has estimated that parent volunteers are saving the school $1500 a year in cleaning costs alone. Courses taught by parents are not such a clear saving, since many would not be offered otherwise, but they are a visible contribution.

More significantly, in early 1974 a parent group was at work on what would be, if successful, the most important single change to be brought about in the school's structure by parents themselves, the addition of seventh and eighth grades. The Stones took a neutral position. "The trustees are willing to do it, if the grades can be self-supporting," they said. It appeared very likely that the parents would succeed in the effort since they quickly obtained an anonymous pledge of underwriting sufficient for a class of at least ten children, and were able to establish a planning group.

After careful consideration, the decision was made to look in a totally different direction. Based on study data, the school decided to try to establish a program for parents of infants from six weeks of age. According to Olivero, "Very few parents are ever taught how to parent. And it's important to look at problems early, even before children start pre-kindergarten. We're developing a plan for a "parenting model," a place where parents can bring infants when they have problems, but not a day care center."

Funding for this project is now being sought. And in addition to

this change, more changes lie ahead. The Stones have made it clear that the school will become self-supporting. As they gradually withdraw their financial support, voices of other parents will likely be heard even more strongly.

Finally, the parents and their enthusiasm about the school contribute to the extraordinarily high morale at Nueva. The staff speak of this as "the feeling of community," and even a visitor of a few hours may see it expressed in numerous ways, from the instant availability of the director to a young child asking for a word of advice to the friendly politeness which marks conversation at all levels.

"We talk about it as 'humanizing the school environment,' " says psychologist Harold Dillehunt. "Part of the way it's done is through shared decision-making, with people who are affected by decisions having the right to participate in them. And that, of course, includes both the students and their parents. We have reached the point now where I think people would no longer tolerate *not* sharing. "But it is more than that, too. Part of it is a deliberate effort by the teaching staff to take care of one another. And that, of course, affects the way that they take care of the kids."

In the complex interrelationship of the home and the school, the parents, too, are involved in the creation of this spirit. The outcome at Nueva indicates that whether through the observable structure or through processes too subtle for the outsider to see, parents are playing a significant and perhaps underestimated part in its success.

It is apparent that formally the parents at Nueva have a subordinate place in the community structure. The dominant features and direction of the school have been established by the collaboration of its bold founders with innovative educational professionals. But formal authority is not everything, and the parents' great satisfaction with the school, as well as their high degree of participation, suggests that they are playing a bigger part than perhaps they were assigned, and that their part is growing.

CHAPTER 3
A Fight for Community Schools in West Virginia

James Branscome*

"Yes, sir," Leonard Thompson begins, leaning back in his chair, "they ain't no music like good hound music when they bring that fox around the ridge." He interrupts himself for a moment to spit some tobacco juice into an empty half-pint milk carton, and continues, "But, if I had my druthers, I'd spend most of my time a catching snakes — copperheads, rattlesnakes, any kind. Jus' like to do that for some reason, 'specially when I ain't bass fishing."

With his checkered flannel shirts, working man's shoes, a closely cropped haircut, and not overly strict reverence for the "king's English," Leonard Thompson could be mistaken for America's version of the Scotch-Irish mountaineer. He would not mind being called a "hillbilly" so long as it was another hillbilly using the phrase, but he could rise to unusual outrage if he detected the slightest "notion" that the word was being bandied about by those folks who are possessed by the TV-comic strip version of Appalachians as seen in the "Beverly Hillbillies" and "Lil' Abner." He's independent certainly, and his world view is parochial to the point of preferring the baying of a "Treeing Walker" hound to the opera. Though he never quite says it, Thompson figures that mountaineers are mightly close to being a superior race, and anybody who does not realize that probably deserves to have to

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live on top of a pile of concrete instead of on the side of a West Virginia mountain. Thompson wouldn't trade his weather-beaten face, his good health at sixty, or his job as principal of the Fort Gay Elementary School for anything in the world.

Most people would not share Thompson's view that Wayne County, West Virginia, is the center of the universe. Not very much has ever happened here. No major Civil War battle was fought here, no revered statesman was born here, and — with one exception — no great general or statesman ever visited the county. That exceptional visit was paid in 1960 by Presidential-aspirant John Kennedy during the West Virginia primary. The young millionaire expressed shock at the poverty he saw in Wayne County's hollows and promised that the New Frontier would have the revitalization of West Virginia high on its agenda. Kennedy's visit marked the beginning of a new discovery of Appalachia. David Brinkley stood on a rickety, one-lane bridge across the Tug River in Wayne County and told his viewers of the stark poverty of the people and their fascination with Kennedy. In return for the attention, Wayne Countians named the bridge the "David Brinkley Bridge" and hung a sign with his name from its beams. In 1971 an overloaded truck dumped the bridge into the river. Only a few days later the favorite joke in the county was about how "the sound of the bridge hitting the river bottom was the only damned thing we've heard from that War on Poverty."

The joke aside, the flood of social legislation in the sixties had little impact on Wayne County. The Community Action Program (CAP) never really got started in the county before it became buried in the battle for the spoils with the poor lining up as a majority to be whipped by the minority — the politicians. In neighboring Mingo County the scene was somewhat different, but the energetic CAP director, Huey Perry, was forced out and retreated to Charleston to write a book about his experiences called, *They'll Cut Off Your Project.* The fact that some action by the poor was taken in Mingo County was evidence enough for the Wayne County politicians that they could not let the same happen in their territory. The county school board kept Head Start out by refusing use of school property. They used Title I, Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) federal money to purchase a TV broadcasting unit and a TV set for every classroom, principal's office, and empty space in the school superintendent's office. Like the fox held at bay by Leonard Thompson's hounds, the federal government searched for a hole and ran in it.

The county school system developed its own special explanation of community action in Wayne County. In a brochure written for submission to the U.S. Office of Education, the school officials explained:

> *The Office of Economic Opportunity and Community Action groups have not been active in this area because of the lack of leadership and organization. Most of the indigent people are content to leave the welfare of their families to the Department of Public Assistance.*

In 1970 the county's average family income was just over $3,000.

In some hollows the number of persons on welfare assistance was 60 percent of the population; in others it was 90 percent. Of the 1,000 first graders who entered the county school system in 1960, only 600 remained to graduate in 1972. Many of the county's unemployed had betted their eighth grade education against the chance of a job "up North" and left for Ohio and Michigan industrial plants. For those left behind, there were jobs in the county's largest industry — education. The system employs 600 people: 500 of them are teachers, 100 are in custodial or supportive jobs. The qualifications for a job as a teacher, other than a college degree from nearby Marshall University, are kinship and unswerving devotion. For other jobs, like driving a bus, kinship and votes will suffice. In both cases, non-Wayne Countians need not apply.

Wayne County would seem an unlikely area for an experiment in "school-community parity in decision-making," especially if parity is defined as "mutual, collaborative decision-making on the part of those rendering and those receiving services." The phrases are from the guidelines developed by the Urban/Rural School Development Program, Bureau of Educational Personnel Development, U.S. Office of Education. In October, 1970 Wayne County School Superintendent Sam Hubbard was advised that his system had been selected by the U.S. Office of Education (OE) to participate in the program. Provided that both he and the community agreed to accept the program, OE promised $750,000 over a five-year period to conduct teacher retraining. The guidelines stipulated that the money be spent on a "cluster" of schools. After preliminary negotiation, Superintendent Hubbard and OE agreed on three schools in southern Wayne County: Fort Gay High, Fort Gay Elementary where Leonard Thompson is principal, and the Thompson Elementary School on Mill Creek. Even though he had signed a preliminary agreement, Superintendent Hubbard was uncertain as to exactly what the program was about, he told me later.

Urban/Rural was the second program developed under the "discretionary" authority granted OE in the Education Professions Development Act (EPDA) of 1968. The Career Opportunities Program (COP) was the first. Unlike COP, and even the various programs of ESEA, the Urban/Rural Program mandated that community people comprise at least 51 percent of the board that made policy decisions at the local level. Perhaps most importantly, the Urban/Rural program guidelines made it clear that school and teacher inadequacies — and not the background of the students — were responsible for poor pupil achievement. Policy planners inside OE admit the program idea was not "hatched from our heads" as one said, but was rather an outgrowth of the criticism OE had been getting from both the "experts about" and the "victims of" so-called compensatory education. "Community control," eventually reduced by policy decisions to "shared control," were new words in 1970 for OE guidelines.

The program called for the development of a School/Community Council (SCC) composed of both teachers and the community. The SCC

was assigned a number of organizing and implementation tasks, including:

- assessing the education needs of the school and community;
- developing a long range plan for improving educational resources of the school and community;
- implementing this plan through a program of school staff training and the employment of a School Development Team Manager (SDTM);
- developing procedures for evaluating the program and assuring that, to the extent possible, it was coordinated with the other federal programs in the school.

The Stanford Leadership Training Institute (LTI), under the leadership of Dr. Robert Hess, was given the task of organizing the community input of the SCCs and providing the whole SCC with technical assistance in carrying out its job. The Stanford LTI in 1970 hired nine Regional Coordinators to work at the local level with the Urban/Rural sites in 27 states and territories, ranging from Puerto Rico to the state of Washington. All sites were chosen on a geographical basis, with poverty levels and ethnic representation being prime considerations. I was employed as Regional Coordinator for Appalachian sites in three states, including Wayne County, West Virginia.

My first job was to meet with the school system of Wayne County and to *negotiate* the formation of an SCC. In addition, I had to hire a local community person, a "local facilitator" as LTI called them, who would be responsible for the initial community meeting to decide whether local people would accept the program. Due to delays at OE, it was actually May 1971, when I arrived in Wayne County to begin my work. At the time I was twenty-five, half the age of Superintendent Sam Hubbard. In my few years of traveling around my native region, I knew more than I needed to know about the power of school superintendents; Sam Hubbard had spent fourteen years surviving as one. The idea of him "negotiating" with me over "parity" struck me as something more than absurd. But, [illegible]h the OE promise "to hold the system at bay," as one staffer had told us at a LTI meeting, I headed for Wayne County.

Sam Hubbard makes Leonard Thompson, at his slowest drawl, seem like a fast talker. He likes to be called "Doctor" and would probably have his secretary pitch anyone out of his office who said a word like Appalachia, or hillbilly or asked him how the fox hunting was in these parts. Sam Hubbard is a mountain professional. Professionals are trained to be different from the other people, and, in the mountains where they are scarce, they see to it that the word never gets around that they are just ordinary folks like everyone else. So Sam Hubbard wasted no time in telling me that he remembered "signing something" saying something about "parity," but that it really did not interest him because OE had "already advised me that I have fiscal control." I carefully pointed out that the SCC was to have administrative control

of the program and the funds, and that he was to sign the checks. He carefully reminded me that in West Virginia the county sheriff signs all the checks, and, besides:

> *I have the power through the Board of Education to stop the program. We don't want any rabble-rousers around here like those community action groups in Crum (a nearby community) . . . I guess I'm from the old school. I'm trained in education. We know more about education than Mrs. John Doe, housewife, though I know we've got to listen to them more. But the community shouldn't tell us what to have in schools, what teachers, etcetera. They're not going to start administering things.*

Lesson Number One: don't ever challenge a professional to a battle with a piece of paper; he'll let you win every time. Sam Hubbard had seen more guidelines in his time from Washington than Leonard Thompson had snakes, and he knew from experience that they didn't bite. We both signed our names to an "interim agreement" saying that a SCC would be formed, have control over spending the funds, planning the program, and be able to hire its own personnel. I left Hubbard's office and headed to see Fort Gay.

The principal at Fort Gay High School had heard that "his school was in some kind of new program" but he didn't have time to talk about it, really. It was raining hard and he had to round up the bus drivers before the roads flooded out. It was also class ring day for the seniors. Sam Hubbard had told me this principal was a real dedicated man, but I was not surprised a year later when he went to work selling class rings full-time. Fort Gay High had been built in the Depression and looked like it. Fort Gay Elementary across the road had been built in 1922 and looked better. And Leonard Thompson, the principal, could have cared less about class rings or the flooding. "As long as it's good for the kids, I'm for it," he said. "I'm glad to hear that the government has finally decided that some of the things we used to do in country schools are all right after all."

Seven miles out on Mill Creek at Thompson Elementary School, Mrs. Mavis Martin, principal, knew all about "the new program" and she hoped the money could be spent for teacher aides. It could not. The Thompson School had 159 students and six classrooms. Two of the six teachers had not been certified. Its kindergarten room, the janitor said, had been built as an "apple bin." It would not hold many apples. Most of the children came from welfare homes.

Up the road and across one bridge from the Mill Creek School, Damron's Store is as country as they get. The lone gas pump is on the outside, right under the sign that says "We honor government food stamps." Inside is a pot-bellied stove and about everything you need to survive in Mill Creek. After a Pepsi and a bag of peanuts, I explained that I was looking for a "local facilitator" to get moving on this new government program. Mrs. Hazel Damron was very sympathetic. She was more lively and knew more about the local schools than anybody I had seen all day. We agreed on a salary figure, and Hazel Damron was off and running as

one of the best local facilitators the Stanford LTI had.

With Hazel Damron's cooperation, we worked out an agreement with Sam Hubbard for a 21-member School Community Council. Nine would be teachers — three from each school — chosen by their peers. Ten would be community people chosen at an open meeting of the community. Two would be high school students.

In May of 1971 I returned to the Thompson Elementary School to address a meeting of community people to discuss the Urban/Rural program. About 75 persons turned out, most of them having responded to local facilitator Hazel Damron's personal contact and extensive newspaper and radio announcements. I explained the Urban/Rural guidelines in detail and then opened up the meeting for questions and responses. I got more than I had expected. The general response was one of skepticism: the audience seemed to believe that I had described just another federal program, many said if they could not buy equipment with the grant, then they were not interested in it. Others said that trying to reform their schools was going about the problem backwards — economic development had to precede educational development. After more than two hours of discussion, the group voted to accept the program. After another two hours they finally managed by secret ballot to select 12 men (dozens of women were present, but the Scottish-Irish tradition of male domination prevailed) to serve on the Council.

After the meeting I met with the Council to discuss the program in even more detail. By midnight we were all exhausted, but the group was more enthusiastic than they had been at the start. I continually urged that they use the Urban/Rural program as a means of attacking other educational and economic problems in the community; that they view education in more than just "school" terms. Before the meeting ended, I also advised them to meet as a group several times without the teachers present to get to know each other and to think through carefully what they thought were the major needs in their schools and communities. (I had already met with the teachers.) As it turns out, telling them to have these private meetings was the best advice I ever gave the Council. It allowed them to gain some confidence in their own group and to assess thoroughly what a school should be. While the group was not a welfare rights group like ones that meet in cities, it was a group of "common laborers," first generation union men, and farmers accustomed to airing their complaints only in the privacy of the pot-bellied stove at Hazel Damron's country store.

The SCC set to work immediately to complete a needs assessment and to make proposals for change in the schools. While they had an option to pay themselves for attending the weekly meetings — some lasting until 2:00 a.m. — the members, including teachers, voted to serve without pay. OE had promised a different kind of program in Urban/Rural. The sky was the limit — except for equipment purchases and relating it all somehow to personnel improvement — the OE people said. The $250,000 would be there when the people were ready.

The Leadership Training Institute provided the School Communi-

ty Council with consultants on request and designed a three-day training session for the community members. Our emphasis was on insisting that the community do as much as possible by itself. We warned them about snake-oil consultants bearing packaged programs and instant solutions; about local teacher's colleges which helped create the educational mess and which got government "reform" money to mess things up some more; and about OE which had never behaved this way before. It was good advice. The snake-oil salesmen came in droves. The SCC turned them away. The teacher's colleges came from four states, as far away as Michigan. They went home penniless. But then came the government, the one that was supposed to "hold the system at bay." Sorry about that $250,000 start-up money, they said, it has to be cut by a hundred thousand. Sorry about that promise of no deadline, it's the first of October. Sorry about saying any community input is better than a Pert-chart, we must have a line-item budget.

The SCC decided Washington could sit on its collective duff and make contradictory statements to all those people "out there" somewhere if it pleased. They were going to act as if nothing had changed. On September 2 the SCC sent me their draft proposal, minus a line-item budget, but full of good educational sense about Fort Gay schools. The proposal included statements such as these:

> *This council feels the principal way to solve the problems of our educational system is to involve the general public in school activities. We, therefore, will concentrate our efforts along these lines. Under a second priority, the secondary problems of reading and math, as well as vocational education, will be studied and possible solutions found and inserted into the school curriculum. Different types of classes, lectures, and demonstrations will be offered to teachers and parents to increase their knowledge of child behavior.*

And it said things like this: "Drinking fountains insufficient in number, water pressure poor, and warm water."

Components of the project included: (1) career education K-12; (2) individualized instruction; (3) health and nutrition; (4) language arts; (5) community school development; and (6) adult education. Even though the Council had been told repeatedly by both LTI and OE that equipment was *verboten*, they insisted on an FM radio station and a press to print a community newsletter.

Still active, even with a full-scale re-organization going on and still no full-time staff for Urban/Rural, OE decided the proposal deadline would be November 1, not October 1. A sigh of relief at Fort Gay. Then on November 9 a staffer called to say he had seen their proposal and it "would never see the light of day in the grants-management division." What about those promises other staffers had made about "loose" proposals being the best proposals. Their staffer said he did not know. He had just come "on board." Rather than complain about OE, he advised, the SCC should be complaining about the Stanford LTI because, "It is obvious from your proposal that you have

not taken advantage of consultative expertise." By the way, he said, the deadline had been moved up to December 15.

The SCC decided that all its effort could not go down the drain. Hazel Damron contacted the state office of education, which in turn contacted Marshall University, 40 miles away in Huntington. Marshall put three consultants to work for three days. The result: a proposal with Pert-charts, organization schemes, a complex evaluation model ("which requires a clear description of the context into which input, process and product matrix is cast") and a report schedule. The proposal became a 67 page jargon heap, rather than a 20 page piece of educational brilliance. Simple sentences written by the community were changed to read:

> Objectives: *The objective of this project is to develop in a rural school service area a model school/community development program which results in the merging of school and community resources in a mutual reinforcing and supportive role to improve education and community life.*

As the head of the Marshall University team said later, "the proposal represented nothing unusual in terms of the kind of work we've done in the area before." The final proposal also stated, "Marshall University will serve as the prime contractor in providing the expanded program of personnel development described under each project component narrative."

Meanwhile, Sam Hubbard had been demonstrating that the pursestrings could be used to choke community control as effectively as anything else. Expenses submitted by the SCC never got paid. As Larry Pelfry, the SCC community chairman said at one point in exasperation:

> *I guess we're all pretty tired. I'm not really sure what we have to talk about tonight. I'm pretty fed up with this situation. I'm owed $400 and would wash my hands of the whole thing if I didn't think that's exactly what they wanted me to do . . . Everybody blames the money problem on somebody else. You go and hire consultants and get 'em to come in on these things and they don't ever get paid. Nobody gets paid.*

As dismal as the situation looked in some respects, it was hopeful in others. To the community members' surprise, Leonard Thompson and Joe Wellman, the new principal at Fort Gay High, took the community's side in its battles with the teachers. The SCC was also learning it had political clout. It intervened with the School Board and obtained an addition to the Thompson School for a kindergarten room that the Superintendent planned to build in another area of the county. It also pushed for and got commitments from the School Board for a new vocational school in the southern end of the county. Thanks to a controversy over an overspent school budget amounting to over $272,000, Sam Hubbard had little time to concentrate on monitoring the SCC. The major impediment that remained was the Office of Education.

On January 13, 1972, Robert Fillion, the third OE project officer

assigned to Fort Gay, arrived. The SCC minutes of two days later reflect the outcome of his visit:

> *Chairman Pelfrey, assisted by Task Force members who worked with project officer Fillion, discussed briefly the outcome of Fillion's visit to Fort Gay. Many changes must be made in the proposed budget and material rewritten to justify the items proposed. Mr. Fillion did not look favorably on the Career Awareness, Vocational Education, and Community School programs. Since these were of vital interest to the SCC, it is hoped their approval can be obtained in the future. Mr. Fillion indicated prior to leaving, that he had enough information to release some money, but revisions must be made by the end of February to obtain the full grant.*

The Council went to work again. This time, however, they were fed up. At their next meeting, having met weekly since the inception of the project, they voted to pay themselves $10 per meeting.

In February of 1972 the Council was still going about its business, even though it still had no word from OE about the approval of its proposal. In this month they hired Mike Sullivan, an Ohioan with federal projects experience at the secondary level, as School Development Team Manager (SDTM). The same month the Council also hired Sue Crabtree, a local woman with no college training, to be its Community Services Counselor, a person who would go to the homes of all parents to explain the Urban/Rural program and to provide whatever services the family needed to better prepare their children for school. Several members also attended a Community Education Workshop at Flint, Michigan, and, surprisingly, were asked by the Mott Foundation to submit a proposal for funding of a community education program. Optimism began to rise again.

In March the SCC received word that its proposal was "unfundable" and that the SCC should come to Washington with a representative of the School Board and negotiate the proposal. The SCC boned up for a good fight. When Hazel Damron, Larry Pelfry, Joe Wellman and Henry Ray got to Washington, they learned that the OE project officer in charge of negotiating had never even read their proposal. A subordinate told them "You must not be able to read," among other insults. Such statements as these from OE were more than Henry Ray, the Assistant Superintendent for Wayne County, could take. He gave the project officer a tongue lashing. After the two-day ordeal, the Fort Gay people won. They would get an FM radio station ($8,500), a press for a community newsletter, a career awareness program, an adult learning center, and all the other items on which they had been insistent. While there was jubilation at Fort Gay, Hazel Damron's response was, "We knew it would be approved someday if we just fought long enough, so we just went on about our business." In April 1972 the long-promised grant came through.

April was a watershed month for the Council. Negotiations with a contracting university for teacher training were underway. Sue Crabtree, the Community Services Counselor, was winning high praise

from all quarters for her success in getting into the community homes and explaining the Urban/Rural program. By now she was helping people find welfare, food stamps, and hearing exams for slow learners. Her work balanced the bureaucratic/management attitude taken by the SDTM Mike Sullivan.

The Council's "finest hour," however, was their sponsorship of a Mountain Heritage Day on April 22. It was organized by the Council's Community Education staff leader, Mike Ferguson, a former teacher at Fort Gay and an early member of the Council. The flyer that went out in the community newsletter explained that the Heritage Day was to be an Appalachian celebration complete with an apple butter stir, craft making, fiddling, and a salute to all things that make mountain life still – despite problems – an alternative culture.

More than 750 persons turned out on the rainy day of April 22 to attend the Heritage Day. It was the largest gathering in Fort Gay history. "For the first time," said Larry Pelfrey, "the politicians came to ask our help." For those who are familiar with the cultural sterility of mountain schools and want to make a change, the effort of the community at Fort Gay to launch Appalachian Studies was a welcome day indeed. This first Heritage Day was to be only one of several throughout the year.

By the summer teachers at Fort Gay were taking resident courses in Fort Gay on subjects ranging from career awareness to "Appalachian culture and its impact in education." Things were changing in Fort Gay – slowly perhaps – but the old game of accusing activists of being "rabble-rousers" and "outsiders" was not working for the politicians this time. After the first turnout for Heritage Day, the SCC had a fighting chance to survive. In 1973 the Stanford LTI changed its role from community advocacy to on-going technical assistance. All the regional coordinators, including myself, were phased out. I have, however, kept in touch with Fort Gay. The project continues, the community fights on. The radio station signs on each day with a student announcer. The inevitable resignations, rumors, personality clashes, and bureaucratic fumblings go on, too. Despite reasons for optimism about this program, despite the unusual strength displayed by the community *and* the teachers in fighting for what they believe is best, and despite the fact that this is a site where "parity" and the objectives of the Urban/Rural program have come closest to being realized, there remain a number of problems which would seriously deflect the efforts of the Council.

Among these problems are:

• The possibility that the community members will become discouraged and give up. Even though as a result of many victories they are a cohesive group, they feel less than successful in fighting the School Board and the state bureaucracy to obtain a vocational school for their area, an item high on their list of community and educational needs. Meeting every week for an average of four hours a night eventually may take its toll, too. The capacity of the bureaucracy to wear

down even the most tireless people seems inexhaustible.

• The Council became so disenchanted with the Office of Education that a major bureaucratic bungle – such as a budget cut, or a program denial – could result in the resignation of several community members of the Council. As threatening as Superintendent Hubbard is to the Council directly, it is no exaggeration to say that the sloth of OE is more threatening.

• Professionals hired by the School Community Council pose a threat to its survival. Some expertise is earned – but often the claim of expertise serves the professional self-interest more than the community people who were supposed to be helped.

• Another issue is whether the teachers will continue to participate actively on the Council and in the training program. While their past and present performance has been most cooperative, the Council spends much of its time mediating grievances brought to the meetings by teachers wanting a course change, tuition paid, etc.

• The goal of the community members of the Council (from the beginning) has been to see major changes made not only in the schools, but in the community as well. To succeed at changing either, they need to take full advantage of all other available resources in the area. Most of these resources are other federal educational monies coming into the county. For several months the Council has tried and failed to get a copy of the county's Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act proposals. Even though the law requires that they be given the proposal, neither they nor I have had any success in getting the proposal, even with intervention from Washington. The lack of integration of federal programs in Wayne County is a definite stumbling block. In this area, Urban/Rural guidelines are definitely not being adhered to.

• While unlikely, another threat is that the present community members could lose their seats in School Community Council election. This will happen only if they let their guard down, but their opponents control many jobs in the county and can turn out hundreds of people at an election meeting.

There are several factors on the positive side. They reflect some of the important lessons learned in this project. These include:

• One individual such as Hazel Damron can make a project go; one bureaucrat can kill the effort of a dozen Hazel Damrons if so allowed.

• Providing people with training and, most importantly, information can result in changes in the school system, especially when these people believe there is hope for change.

• Adopting an attitude that people can solve their own problems may be the most important resource that can be provided to a community group.

• Professionals *can be dealt with effectively* – their ambition channeled in new directions, their egos supplemented by other than the rewards of authority.

• Training sessions outside a person's home territory tend to be the

most effective; this is true even though the best learning seems to be by experience.

- *Parity* can be achieved where the community is given proper training and half a chance; the important variable seems to be, however, the condition that both the Washington officials and the School Board are absorbed in looking the other way.

Regardless of my own personal feelings that "parity" is a long way from being achieved at Fort Gay, it is a bright spot in an otherwise sometimes dismal school picture to know that there is a Hazel Damron or Leonard Thompson doing some often thankless work to make schools better.

Editor's Note

We checked with Jim Branscome recently to see what has happened in Fort Gay since he first wrote his story. Some important changes have occurred in the cast of characters. Hazel Damron has resigned from the SCC. Sam Hubbard has been replaced as superintendent. The Team Manager of the project is now Joe Wellman, who was the principal of the high school and who supported the community. Most important, a number of the projects are alive and well — the learning center, the instant library, the radio station, a newsletter for parents. The story of Federal money continues for another year. What happens then will have to be told in another book.

CHAPTER 4
Learning In Louisville Is A Two-Way Street

Wallace Roberts*

Car Foster was out of breath and laughing. It was nine o'clock in the evening, and he had just chased a sixth-grader through the back alleys of Louisville, Kentucky. The chase had extended for several blocks, over fences and between the small, single-story shotgun shacks, empty warehouses, and abandoned factories. Finally, the boy had run up onto the porch of a house and cried out:

"You can't touch me. This is my house."

The boy and the man stood there, staring at each other. Then a large man appeared in the doorway.

"What's going on here?" he said.

Foster countered, "Does this kid live here?"

"Nope," said the man. Foster caught the boy by the arm, hauled him off the porch and gave him hell.

Car Foster is the principal of the Roosevelt Elementary School in the Portland section of Louisville, and running through alleys at night is part of his job. To be sure, such duties are not listed in the official job description, but like many traditional ideas about schooling, the image of a principal as a distant, detached figure was thrown out two years earlier when Foster came to Roosevelt as part of a city-wide crash effort to reverse the accelerating decay of the city's school system. Running through back alleys comes under the heading of caring, the way Car Foster describes his job. The object of his chase had done nothing more than run around in the halls of the school after a PTA meeting when Foster was trying to clear the building so he could get home. Youthful exuberance.

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"But you've got to be absolutely straight every minute. That's what caring, what respect is all about. And that kid held me up for no good reason except his own pleasure, and he had to be told that was wrong right then."

He laughed again. "I finally caught him, but he sure could run."

Car Foster is about 50 years old, five feet, six inches tall, with gray, wavy hair, tight lips and the strut of a bantam. He used to be a professor of counseling at the University of Kentucky but his contract was not renewed — he was teaching courses using encounter groups. In 1969, the Louisville Board of Education hired a new superintendent, Newman Walker, who brought with him a lot of new administrative blood, including Car, who worked first as an O. D. consultant on teacher training, and then as assistant superintendent in charge of the same thing. After three years, he gave it up to become a principal. "I was telling these teachers and principals they needed to love the kids, and I decided I couldn't really ask them to do it if I couldn't do it myself."

He picked the toughest, oldest, most dilapidated, elementary school in the city, and in May of 1972, the teachers and the parents of the Roosevelt Elementary School were told they were going to get a new principal in the fall.

"At first we didn't know what Car was going to be like," recalled Mrs. Anita Phillips, current chairwoman of the Roosevelt Neighborhood School Board. Mrs. Chasteen Bush, who was the chairwoman of the board when Car was appointed, agreed. "We were afraid he wouldn't let us do anything, just like the last principal."

Both women are long-time residents of the Portland community, the "poor white" section of the city, and both have been involved with Roosevelt for a long time. Mrs. Bush even attended the school as a child, and now her youngest is there in the fourth grade. Mrs. Bush works as the school-community organizer, rounding up classroom volunteers, candidates for the board, and people to help her with the detail work of running the evenings of bingo and chili suppers she uses as organizing tactics. Mrs. Bush said that the changes in the school that have happened since 1971 are mainly those of tone and atmosphere. "It's like now we have a sense that something is happening, that we're going somewhere. Before, the board was never really together. We couldn't do anything. Then Car came. The man before him was the kind of person, the only kind we've ever had here, who sits behind his desk, and we had to ask him for permission to do anything.

"But Car's not like a principal. We found that out pretty fast, but we didn't know at first what he was going to be like. When we heard that he was going to be our new principal, the school board went up to his office and talked with him. Up to then the board had been a board in name only; we hadn't done anything because the old principal was opposed to the neighborhood school boards — he's now principal in a school where they just started to organize a board. But then we invited Car and Jimmy Coleman (James M. Coleman, ass't. superintendent for community relations) to a special meeting of the board and

started talking about what we wanted to do."

The conversation is still going on, and more and more people are speaking out. "That first school board election in 1971, we had hardly any parents interested in running. Thirteen parents ran in the election last year, and six of the staff ran in the first election, ten in the second. This year it looks like it will be even tighter," Mrs. Phillips said.

Mrs. Bush explained, "It's happened because we've been able to show the community we've been able to get things done. They lose interest if they can't get anything done, but we've been doing them. We decided last year we didn't want to send our sixth-graders over to Western for junior high; it's too big there, and overcrowded, and we wanted to keep them here in the community. So we got all geared up for a big fight with the city board, expecting they'd say no, but they just caved right in. We couldn't believe it."

She said the parents also got upset about discipline in the school. Many of them felt a vague antipathy towards Car because he did not sit behind his desk and wear a suit, or even a tie and jacket to work, because many of the teachers were young, with long hair, and even more casual attitudes about dress, and because both Car and these teachers seem to allow the kids to do anything they wanted.

"The parents were really upset," Mrs. Bush said. "They could see that their kids really liked the school — there are all kinds of stories the parents tell — but they called for a workshop of the board and demanded that Car get onto this discipline problem. After much discussion between staff and parents, the board decided to back Car and the staff in their new philisophy of self-direction for students."

Currently the main topic of the Roosevelt community is teacher evaluation by the Neighborhood School Board. There are meetings and training sessions to talk over the evaluation processes and definitions, but really just to get to know each other, to break down the barriers and stereotypes that made them see each other as antagonists.

"Some of the teachers are very leery," Mrs. Bush continued. "They have the feeling we're not coming in to look for anything good, just the bad. But we're going to be looking for the good, too. We all just have to feel our way. Last year when we found out that some of the staff admitted that they were scared of us, we couldn't believe it. I can still hardly believe it. When I was growing up, the only time a teacher came to our house was when one of us had done something wrong at school, but some of these teachers go to the homes of each student, just to talk. First time they came to my house I was scared. Didn't know what to say, how to act, but they're all human. We all found that out."

As Mrs. Bush indicated, what's happening at Roosevelt is being repeated to varying degrees throughout almost all of the Louisville public schools. The former principal of Roosevelt, who did not want to work with a neighborhood school board, transferred elsewhere and now finds himself facing the same situation. At another school there is a new school board and a sympathetic principal but also an obvious lack of experience with working with each other and with the whole

idea of a school board. At a third school, there is a board, an indifferent principal, and an energetic school-community organizer, with the result that the school appears untouched by a spirit that is obviously vitalizing the rest of the community.

Louisville has more than 60 schools, and there is something going on at each one. They are all different, and most of them are unlike the stereotypical image of urban schools, although at the end of the Sixties many of these schools fit that stereotype. The school system had the second highest dropout rate in the nation; of the 50,000 children (50 percent White, 50 percent Black), 34 percent came from families with an annual income of $2,000 or less, and 71 percent of the students were scoring below national achievement averages.

Still, there were some things going for the Louisville schools. It was the first major southern city to integrate its schools successfully, and it has had for a long time a school board that is remarkably independent of the scummier aspects of electoral politics. In addition, the Louisville Education Association has been cooperative on key issues such as integration and education experimentation that included the establishment of neighborhood school boards.

In 1969, Sam Noe, the old superintendent, retired. Scott C. Detrick, present chairman of the school board, a board member for 13 years, and a friend of Sam Noe, said that Sam told the board at his retirement dinner that he had done the best he could, but that it hadn't been good enough, that the board had a duty to go and pay a lot of money to hire the best superintendent they could.

After interviewing 30 candidates, the board chose Dr. Newman Walker, superintendent of the Paducah, Kentucky schools, who immediately began planning to change the schools by changing the teachers. The first few months were spent getting to know the community and writing funding proposals to the federal government and foundations. But before presuming to change the teachers, Walker and his fellow administrators took a look at themselves in a series of workshops aimed at getting to know each other better and imparting the principles of conflict management. Then in December 1969, the first of several projects, called "Impact", was announced, and a few months later, "Focus" was unveiled. Fourteen schools were selected to participate in a variety of educational experiments, most of them funded with more than a million dollars in additional federal grants that Walker and his assistants had secured through careful planning and persistent lobbying.

Teachers and principals participated in a special summer course using sensitivity training techniques before the "Focus" and "Impact" project schools opened in the fall. Before the end of the school year, the teaching positions in the 14 project schools were all declared open, and teachers from all over the city were invited to apply to take the training courses and work in the schools. Some teachers in the project schools retired, others transferred, and their places were taken by other transfers, new teachers, and Teacher Corps interns. The school district rented a Baptist summer camp, and for eight weeks that sum-

mer, the teachers were put through a training program designed by Car Foster to help them understand their own behavior and how it affects those around them, both students and colleagues. Some of the sessions concentrated on technical problems, such as curriculum changes and the techniques of team teaching, but the overwhelming thrust of the summer program was that if the teachers could be helped to treat students and each other more honestly and openly, the resolutions of the technique problems would come about naturally because of the new respect for each other.

It was a naive vision, as Walker and Foster and most everyone else involved concedes, but it may be that even a faulty vision is important. For six months it seemed that a disastrous mistake had been made. Teachers at some schools, as well as reporters from the sympathetic Louisville *Courier-Journal*, saw little but chaos. Scott Detrick, chairman of the city school board, said it was a year of "many long and gruesome meetings" for him, especially during the fall campaign for the school board positions, as a storm of controversy sprang up over the sensitivity training and the lack of discipline in the project schools. The board held its ground, backed up Newman Walker, and even went through a series of training sessions itself. By spring, much of the discipline problem had abated, especially in the elementary schools, and there began to appear a series of evaluations by the system's research division that indicated definite grounds for optimism. Attendance had remained the same, but vandalism was down 11 percent in project schools, and up 16 percent in non-project schools. Dropouts in project junior high schools dropped 39 percent, and four percent in non-project junior highs. Suspensions were down 70 percent in project schools, and up 45 percent in other schools. There was little change, however, in academic achievement.

What the figures don't show, and can't, is that the change in tone and atmosphere that Mrs. Bush noticed at Roosevelt was evident throughout the city. The controversy over discipline and sensitivity training had the effect of making a lot of people talk for the first time about what should be going on in *their* schools. Walker and his crew of hot shot administrators and hip teachers (Louisville has the largest Teacher Corps program of any city in the nation) were highly manipulative and condescending that first year. Their intentions were good, of course. But *their* attitudes, the effects of *their* behavior was pointed out to them harshly and with genuine anger by the people of the city in a series of workshops, meetings, and confrontations. The message got through.

In the fall of 1971, one of the original proposals for the "Impact" and "Focus" schools which had remained submerged and almost forgotten during the first year, a proposal for neighborhood school boards, was dusted off and planned in detail. In December, the first of a continuing series of workshops was held for the people of those communities that wanted to organize neighborhood school boards. Expert advisers and consultants were flown in to help. Some of it was sensitivity training, but most of it was nuts and bolts stuff on how to run

meetings, organize parents, draw up a set of board by-laws, and so on, all put together by Walker's highly competent ass't. superintendent for community relations, James Coleman.

And then it began to happen; the boards started going their own ways. It was slow at first. Scott Detrick said the hardest job was to convince the neighborhood board members that the central board was going to give the local boards as much power as it legally could. "A lot of them had been involved in anti-poverty programs or something like that before, so they were pretty skeptical." Some boards picked a specific problem, such as a review of its school's drug education curriculum. Others plunged into teacher and principal selection, and still others threw out many of the changes implemented by the Walker team in the first year. Walker held his breath and not only let it happen (he had little choice), he supported it from the central office by focusing the resources of his department of community relations, teacher training and research on problems raised by the neighborhood boards.

It's gone pretty well. Achievement scores are still about the same, but Louisville is beginning to see things as a whole community, to see that problems can only begin to be solved by listening to each other. Last year the central administration's research division sent attitude questionnaires to the teachers to provide the neighborhood boards with statistical profiles of their employees. The teachers cooperated at first, and the research division obtained what it considered some useful information. The second time, though, six months later, the teachers balked and either refused to return the questionnaires or filled them in with obviously inappropriate answers. The researchers went around and asked what had happened, and it was simple: the teachers objected to the probe of their attitudes on such a basis, at being treated so mechanistically, even for apparently worthwhile reasons. So the research division backed off and is searching for new approaches.

That's the essence of the Louisville schools, listening and searching for new ways. The school board listened to Sam Noe, the teachers listened to each other, Walker listened to the parents, the teachers and principals started listening to the parents and the students, and some of the students now are listening, too. Car Foster tells of one young criminal, only twelve years old out on parole from reform school. With a conviction record of nine felonies, this kid was so bad he was not allowed to enroll in a special alternative school for troublemakers. No one, not Car, the social worker, the teacher, not even the kid, thought he would last a week at Roosevelt. But he lasted a year of sixth grade. Car saw him a lot. The kid often made some remark like "I don't know why I'm staying in this school. I been here longer than I've been in any other."

One day at the end of the year, Car and some teachers were in a lounge where there was a Coke machine. The kid came in and asked Car if he would treat him to a Coke. Car asked, "Why should I treat you — what have you done to deserve a Coke?" Give me a paper clip

and I'll show you," he replied.

Car gave him a paper clip, and in less than 60 seconds, the kid had picked the lock of the Coke machine.

"And we hadn't lost a nickel out of the machine all year long," Car said.

Editor's Note

Since Wally Roberts wrote his story about Roosevelt School, the Louisville public schools have merged with the Jefferson County school system. The community has also been involved in widely publicized controversy about busing and school desegregation. We asked the staff of the school and members of the neighborhood school board to prepare a brief up-date.

Postscript

Much has happened to Car Foster, Roosevelt people, and Louisville since the previous story was written. Car, the parents, and most of the staff are still together. The board has developed a successful evaluation process that gives those who work at Roosevelt direct, honest, and supportive feedback. It has been so successful that personnel who aren't normally included in the process are requesting that they be evaluated by the same process.

The board has further decentralized by using a task force approach. Previously, the whole board acted on all matters of business. It became more and more involved in all aspects of the school and community until it was simply overloaded. Finally the board grew secure and trusting enough to share the power it had clutched so preciously. Task forces (small groups of board directors and sometimes others who are not on the board), now meet, make decisions, and report to the full board at regular meetings.

The Roosevelt Neighborhood School Board has incorporated. They changed their name to the Roosevelt Community School, Inc., in keeping with their dream to merge the school with the total community. This also enabled them to pursue grants as a non-profit group directly from the government and foundations for the school and the community. They have received three grants. The first was two successive years of funding from Title I totaling almost $200,000 for reading and math programs.

The second was a grant from the National Institute of Education for over $100,000 for an eighteen month period to conduct workshops and assess change in the school and community. This grant has recently been renewed for another eighteen months.

The third was a $50,000 grant from Community Development (City of Louisville) for the community to renovate a house that will be used as a community center, a Parent-Release-Time Program, a shuttle bus service, a tool rental library for community use, and administration funding run by the Roosevelt Community Residents. There are proposals pending to several other places.

The fruits of this labor are beginning to ripen. Students are having fewer problems. Achievement test scores are beginning to rise. Parents are becoming more active and supportive as they see what

their children are doing. There is more positive contact between staff and parents as they develop proposals with brainstorming idea sessions as well as collaborating with the actual writing. Visitors from the outside constantly give praise and support to those who work at Roosevelt.

In the fall of 1974, the Louisville and Jefferson County School Systems faced a court-ordered desegregation mandate. The two systems were also facing problems of leadership, control and cooperation around this court order. Louisville could not effectively desegregate its system within its boundaries, and cross-district busing appeared too difficult to implement. Merger was the only answer, but who would control and who would be the merged superintendent?

Neither system would readily accept the other system's man. Mr. Richard Van House announced his retirement effective January 1, 1975. Almost immediately, Dr. Newman Walker resigned as the Louisville Superintendent and asked for merger of the two systems so they could unite under new leadership. The merger was fought by the county school system, but the State Department of Education ordered a "shotgun" merger in April, 1975. Under Kentucky State Law, the county school system was to be in control. Desegregation was ordered for the merged system, effective September, 1975.

Car and Roosevelt found themselves under a new administration that was more traditional in nature – less certain about the values of community participation. Desegregation did not affect Roosevelt because it had a natural racial mix and was declared an exempt school. However, Roosevelt Community School, Inc. was ignored until the new Jefferson County Board of Education adopted a policy in early 1976, recognizing PTA's as the only advisory group in the local schools. The consequences of this policy have yet to be tested and felt. Roosevelt people have had to modify and develop new skills quickly. They requested Special School Status so that their unique operation would be more acceptable to the new system. This request is still pending.

When Roosevelt people were asked their opinions regarding their future, they said, "We are a more together school, using a variety of talents and skills from a larger number of people and involving more outside help. We are dealing with new problems and challenges. The future is uncertain for all of us, but fortunately we have had lots of experience dealing with unexpected situations. We have all realized the power and the rewards of working together. This process is often hard to start, but once begun, it is impossible to stop."

CHAPTER 5
Principal Plus Parents: Key to Successful Desegregation in Boston

Muriel Cohen*

On the first day of school in September, 1975, eight-year-old Tina Christopulos left her home in one of Boston's fast fading, middle class White neighborhoods to begin the second grade. Home for Tina was in Brighton, a peninsula-like appendage attached to the rest of the city by a narrow neck, bound on one side by the Charles River and on the other two by Newton and Brookline, two of Boston's most expensive suburbs.

In her bright, new school outfit, dark-haired Tina walked to a nearby corner to wait for a school bus. Not far away was the familiar supermarket where her mother worked part time and, on the opposite corner, the 50-year-old red brick Baldwin School.

Tina had started school at the Baldwin, but on that opening day in September, 1975, she was going out of Brighton to a different school in a strange neighborhood — not by choice but by the force of a federal court order. The Brighton youngster was one of more than 20,000 Boston children assigned to new schools as part of a federal desegregation plan.

The long and bitter process that was putting Tina on a school bus in 1974 began a decade earlier when the Massachusetts legislature,

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caught up in the civil rights movement of the early sixties, passed the pioneering Racial Imbalance Law. That legislation affected only Boston and half-a-dozen other cities. It outlawed schools with more than 50 percent Black enrollment.

The Boston School Committee successfully staved off enforcement of that law. As a result, the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare joined the battle and in 1971 notified the committee that Boston was running a dual school system — one for Blacks and one for Whites — in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Even as the federal government held administrative hearings on the civil rights charges, a group of Black parents filed a suit in U.S. District Court arguing that the schools denied Black children equal opportunity as guaranteed by the 14th amendment.

In June, 1974, U.S. District Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., found in favor of the Black parents and ordered into operation a limited desegregation plan for that September. Brighton was not affected. In May, 1975, Garrity broadened his plan and redistricted the entire city. He created an artificial community by tying Brighton, on the outer edge of Boston, with a Roxbury neighborhood where the schools were all Black.

To eliminate such segregation, Tina was among the Brighton White children assigned to the Tobin School. Tina's parents had to make a tough choice. They could send her to a private school, move out of the city, or go along with the judge. They chose to try the plan though they would have preferred that Tina remain at the Baldwin School. After all, by 1975 the Baldwin was pretty much racially mixed. There were Chinese youngsters as well as Black children from the Commonwealth Housing Project, the only substantially Black enclave in otherwise White Brighton.

So Tina was at the bus stop that first morning.

"I had qualms about her going to Roxbury," Tina's mother conceded, "but no more."

Tina's school bus carried her through Brookline, past the high rent apartments and the expensive real estate that supports one of the better school systems in the state. After the smooth surface of the Brookline street, the bus rattled back into Boston where the two communities meet at Brookline Village. Bumping along the rough-patched hardtop and the unyielding trolley tracks, the bus reached Brigham Circle which marks the beginning of the prestigious and widespread Harvard medical complex.

Turning right, away from the Circle and its influential neighbors, the bus traveled a long block to the Mission Church, a local landmark. Then a left turn for a short block to the rear of the church property and a right onto Smith street.

Strung along the left side of the street in a monotonous red brick chain were some of the apartment buildings in the notorious Mission Hill housing project. Most of the first floor units were boarded against

vagrants. On upper floors shattered windows yawned open. Through the empty metal window frames, faded curtains swung out in pathetic defiance of the surrounding mess. Graffiti was scrawled across the outside of the buildings. This was the hopeless detritus of a housing project that had turned in less than a generation from an urban dream to a ghetto nightmare.

Tina's bus stopped in the middle of the block on the opposite side of the street. There stood her new school crowded onto its hillside lot behind a chain link fence, a spread of green park stretching to the Mission Church buildings to its right; more of the desperate looking project buildings to its left.

But the Tobin School, only sixteen years old, was curiously unmarked. Brightly colored panels faced the building; no obscenities marred the walls and the Lexan, vandalproof windows were intact.

Once inside the school Tina found freshly painted and gaily decorated classrooms. The floors of the high ceilinged lobby and the long corridors were shining with fresh polish.

While Tina was riding to Roxbury from Brighton, Black and Hispanic students were making the trip the other way, assigned to White schools in alien neighborhoods.

The fears of violence and hostility against their small children were just as pervasive among the minority parents living in Mission Hill as they were among the White parents who sent their children to Roxbury, the heart of Boston's Black and Spanish speaking community.

"At the time, I was upset, but it was a blessing in disguise," said Mrs. Christopulos of Tina's first year at the Tobin. "She used to be timid, but she has overcome that. At first she had no friends because her classmates in Brighton didn't go along with her, but now she has friends," her mother continued.

In the ten years that Boston was fighting legal and legislative efforts to eliminate racial segregation from the schools, the Tobin School had changed. When it opened in 1959, the school registers held names like Murphy and Kelly and Sullivan; the children came from the Irish Catholic families who lived on Mission Hill or in the housing project and worshipped at the huge, Gothic Mission Church.

When Kay Murphy Werner was assigned to teach at the Tobin in 1973, there were lace curtains on the polished windows opposite the school. "The women were shining windows each morning when I arrived. It looked like regular garden apartments to me," she said of the three story project buildings. "I didn't know it was a low-income housing project," said Werner.

Those were the days when the Tobin was known as a choice school. The grades ran from kindergarten through eight. The building was new. It was close enough to function as a training site for students from Boston State College, itself a former adjunct to the Boston public schools. Teachers were paid a $700 bonus for working with the college students. The faculty was carefully selected and many have since

moved on to administrative positions.

The curriculum was influenced by the Tobin's role as an education laboratory school. Classroom teachers planned their lessons as much for their college observers as for their Tobin students according to one veteran teacher. And the pedagogical style was traditional Boston. The teacher stood at the front of the class and lectured. Everyone else listened.

"We had 45-minute periods and each of us had certain points we wanted to make during that short time. Many times we had 10 or 12 Boston State students watching how we taught," said Costella Laymon, the first Black teacher assigned to the Tobin.

Black families began moving into the project. Soon the school was 65 to 70 percent Black in the lower grades, and 50 to 55 percent in the upper classes. The housing project turned all Black. So did the school until Hispanic families, most of them from Puerto Rico, started occupying the project apartments.

Within seven or eight years of opening, the Tobin School was troubled.

"We didn't have trouble with the students, but from outsiders who simply walked through the building," explained acting principal Charles Gibbons who was on the staff through the most difficult years.

The lobby and auditorium show the scars of those beleaguered times. A charred wall in the auditorium has not been repaired, but the lobby floor has three different shades of green tile where replacements were made after three separate fires. The heat generated by one blaze even cracked the glass brick in one of the walls.

It was while the Tobin was struggling with vandalism, with dropping scores and the problems of deprived children, that the Federal Court scooped it into its desegregation plan. During the first phase — in 1974-75 — the school's grade structure was revised. The top three grades, six, seven and eight were dropped and now the Tobin, like all other elementary schools in the city, houses kindergarten through grade five. In the second step, the Tobin became part of the Mission-Hill/Brighton district and was assigned White children.

Garrity's plan established racial percentages of 38 percent Black, 37 percent White, and 25 percent Hispanic. Those racial percentages simply didn't happen. Brighton's White parents opted out and the school in 1975-76 had about 20 percent White enrollment; the rest Black and Hispanic.

For the Tobin, the 1975 redistricting was traumatic. Non-English speaking parents, adapting to a new country, a new language and lifestyle, were told to put their children on a bus for reasons they found hard to understand. At the same time it meant wooing White children into a school next to one of the toughest housing projects in the city. For Gibbons it was a chance to develop an urban model; a real multi-ethnic school.

To that end, Gibbons, newly appointed acting principal, wheedled a billboard from a Boston advertising agency. In the last week of

August the billboard, atop a building in the farthest section of Brighton, carried a message of welcome from the Tobin School staff to Brighton children. It was a bold and unexpected move in a city that was uptight and largely hostile to busing. For Gibbons, it was a particularly courageous act because there was as much opposition to desegregation within the school system as outside of it. After five days, the billboard was attacked by vandals and the company who contributed it in the hope of promoting peace in the city was vilified for its generosity.

But Gibbons had made his point. His school would reach out to its community wherever it was.

In March, 1976, Gibbons and his assistant, Bob Earley, flew to Puerto Rico at their own expense to learn first hand about the schools and neighborhoods that were sending them most of their Spanish speaking enrollment.

"I wanted to talk to the school people there, to find out the kind of curriculum they teach and explain to them the kind of information we need when they send children to us. Most come with only a report card, no health records, and no way of evaluating the basis of the grades or the program of study."

While Gibbons and Earley cultivated and encouraged community ties with their Black and Spanish-speaking families in Roxbury and with Whites in Brighton, another component of the court order was moving into place.

While the Garrity desegregation plan was a classic design in setting up racial balance standards and reassigning students, it also created new desegregation case law by mandating that the Boston schools enter into contracts with 22 colleges and universities, plus nearly that number of businesses and industries and cultural institutions. Garrity sought to tap the enormous financial, academic, medical, and cultural resources of Boston for the improvement of the schools.

The pairings are varied in scope and involvement. Some Boston schools have shied away from "outside" influence. Others have vigorously sought expert assistance from their university partners. Such was the case with the Tobin, paired with Boston University.

When the pairings were first announced by the court, the response ranged from the cynical to the enthusiastic. There was opposition from high flying, ivory tower types who failed to see how a sophisticated institution like a major university could reach down to the elementary or secondary school level to help. A number of institutions were affected by the fresh money source represented by the pairings. There would be new state, federal, and even private money to promote these artificial unions.

It took months to move the machinery along, but the shotgun wedding of Boston University and the Tobin School has been fertile. The offspring are still proliferating with the promise of more to come following the shakedown year.

B.U. ran diagnostic reading tests in grades one through five. B.U.

students and staff administered and scored the tests and then produced profiles of each child and suggested class and grade groupings for better teaching.

The university's education school ran teacher workshops on how to overcome specific deficiencies in reading. A reading lab, which was shut down for lack of trained personnel, was opened for both enrichment and remediation. Student teachers helped identify motor skill problems among special education children. A bilingual doctoral candidate at B.U. taught Spanish to Tobin personnel, from the principal to the custodian. Two other teachers ran classes in English for Tobin parents in exchange for graduate credits at B.U.

Boston University physical education majors launched a gym program in the Tobin auditorium for lack of better space and then helped Gibbons convince the city's Park and Recreation Department to relinquish their gym, in an adjoining building, for use during the daytime. Gibbons even found someone to cut a gate in the chain link fence between the school and the gym building.

Standing behind Gibbons in all of these efforts is his school community.

"He has the three ethnic groups working together," said Maria Villanueva, education coordinator for the local federally funded poverty agency.

Parents participated in summer workshops run by B.U. which identified the school's greatest weaknesses. They decided that reading should be the highest priority.

Parent and community support is formalized in a multi-ethnic council which has a growing role in the school. Such councils were another dimension of the court's desegregation order which established three levels at which laymen would have a voice in running the schools: the local school council, the Community District Advisory Council (one for each of the nine school districts) and the Citywide Parents Advisory Council at the top of the pyramid.

Councils, like the universities, function at various levels of effectiveness. Gwen Damon of Brighton found the Tobin's heavily involved in the school. By late spring the Council was helping screen candidates for appointment as permanent Tobin principal, as were other councils in other schools. Advice and support from the council was actively sought for any developments in school policy, from curriculum to atmosphere to activities.

The school that had stood stolidly and inflexibly, holding on to the familiar old rules through new times, was beginning to change.

First, the new population. Then the dramatic court order and suddenly a different administration. Gibbons was named acting principal after eight years on the staff, when principal Marjorie Walsh died suddenly at the age of 48.

No one is critical of Miss Walsh, described as a dedicated hard working administrator. But from talks with faculty and community leaders, a picture emerged of a responsible woman who continued to

run a tightly controlled inbred Boston public school in the face of enormous social, economic, and racial pressures.

It had clearly become a school that turned its ear to school headquarters at 15 Beacon Street rather than to the needs of the students.

In her defense, Werner said, "Why she was the first one to bring Black mothers in as lunch aides. She ran a good school," said a loyal Werner.

It all depends on the interpretation of bringing in the mothers. Gibbons has Tobin parents working as volunteers in the library and as classroom aides as well as on the increasingly influential multi-ethnic council. They helped draft the Tobin School's statement of philosophy and objectives in response to a request by Supt. Marion J. Fahey who said she wants every school accountable by virtue of its own goals.

Alice Taylor, a vivacious Black mother, is stationed at a lobby desk to check visitors. A resident of the Mission Hill Extension, part of the neighboring project, Taylor sometimes rides a school bus to Brighton to straighten out a problem a Mission Hill neighbor may be having in a Brighton school.

Otherwise she is major domo of the Tobin School. It was petit Taylor who stood off Black demonstrators demanding release of the children on a day when trouble at nearby English High School spilled out into the project streets.

She refused to send the children into the melee and said later, "I knew they were radicals."

Gibbons had developed strong ties with the neighborhood during his years at the Tobin. "He has never been afraid to go into the middle of that project to take a child home or go to a meeting," said an admiring Mrs. Christopulos of the slightly built, hyperkinetic principal.

Sitting in his sunny yellow office, tuned in to all of the sounds of the school, Gibbons speaks quickly, the words tumbling out of him. He is pleased with B.U. "They don't tell us what to do, instead they ask us what we want," he said.

Professor Robert Gower, B.U. coordinator for the Tobin, said he has become more realistic about expectations for an urban school as a result of his experience at the Tobin. "It is hard to say anything negative about the school because of the severity of the context," said Gower speaking about a school population that includes some of the poorest children in the city with the added handicap of language and cultural differences.

"The results of the pairing," said Gower, "is that the Tobin has created an entire learning environment. Gibbons is getting maximum mileage out of his teachers."

"I can't wait for this year's reading test results," said Mrs. Werner. She has been working with underprivileged children in a Title I program and is pleased with the "jazzy" materials she has found to challenge and stimulate the youngsters. She is confident they have made enormous strides this year, although, "Some of these children come from homes where there is no background and no books."

"The teacher commands great respect in the Puerto Rican culture," said Mrs. Villanueva. "For that reason," she continued, "the Puerto Rican parents admire Gibbons for his efforts to meet every family. In some cases he accompanies a child home to discuss a school problem with a parent."

Still, she is not completely satisfied. There is need, she said, for a bilingual resource room and a bilingual kindergarten. She hints that Gibbons has not worked hard enough to bring them to the Tobin. She credits him, however, for ending the internal segregation for the Spanish speaking. As Hispanic immigration increased, the flow of Hispanic children was shunted into an isolated wing of the building. When Gibbons took over, he relocated the bilingual classes so they are paired with English speaking classes of the same grade level and has promoted interaction between them.

Volunteers from the suburbs have built up the library in the brick-walled lobby and are training local parents to take it over when the books are properly catalogued and regular procedures established.

Among these parents is Tina's mother who rides the bus with the child two days a week to help in the library. Another is Barbara Beattie, who lives in the project, and has had children in the school for the past nine years, with two more on the way. "He really cares about the kids, no matter what color they are," she remarked.

Under Gibbons' sensitive direction, the Tobin is widening its responsibility to its children by its social service. Gibbons talks warmly about the school's dental program, launched before he took over administration of the Tobin.

"It all began when Harvard Dental School wanted to extend its building," Gibbons explains. The local community has been hostile to continuing encroachment by the medical complex and Boston State College and demanded something in trade for the expansion. What was worked out, with the help of parents, was a "swishing" program.

With the support of a federal grant, five dentists began the program in October. They brought their chairs right into the school, identified all the dental problems — caries and orthodontics — and then instituted a weekly fluoride treatment. Every Wednesday two staff members give each child in the school a drink of fluoride liquid. The child swishes it around his mouth — hence the onomatopoetic name — and spits it out.

Because some of the Tobin children were reassigned to Brighton, the swishing program went right along. In order that other children would not feel left out, the preventive treatment has been broadened and an unexpected additional number of children are benefiting from the weekly swishing.

In addition, the Tobin school nurse went one step further. She notified parents of children with serious dental problems. The youngsters who cannot go to a private dentist get the necessary care nonetheless. The school nurse has arranged for a health center van to take the children needing more extensive work to a local dental clinic

during school time.

"Dental work, welfare, you name it, Charlie gets it." Villanueva said. She and Gibbons work closely. He said she has a talent for "scrounging" food, clothing, housing, cash, whatever a distressed family may need in a crisis.

The school year of 1976 went well for Gibbons and his school. No vandalism, no suspensions, no major problems.

When Tina's bus pulled up in the fall of September, 1975, she was on it as an act of faith by her parents. They haven't regretted it. They have chosen the Tobin for Tina next year as has Damon. Her first grader, Todd, was reading at least three books a week by the spring of the year, she said, because of the school's emphasis on reading.

Both Brighton mothers, like those from Roxbury, are effusive about Gibbons. Yet he is a product of the same system that had turned the Tobin into a lab school and rewarded teachers who put discipline and order as the most important elements in teaching. Born and brought up in South Boston, he graduated from English High School and in 1963 — the year Kay Murphy Werner came to the Tobin — from Boston State College.

He is a maverick. Instead of searching out political support to keep him in his job, he is depending on the enthusiasm of his community. Boston schools have been run in a hierarchical and authoritarian structure as unshakeable as the Roman Catholic Church.

Orders came down from the top and the entire structure was dependent on a politically spawned patronage system which limited freedom and inhibited creativity and imagination. In practice, the result was too many schools run by frightened, insecure administrators with little support from timid parents.

That is not a description of Charlie Gibbons, nor of the Tobin School nor of the parents.

If the Tobin School, its parents and staff, can hold the Tina Christopuloses and the Todd Damons from Brighton while serving the educational and social needs of its project children, that total effort will have made desegregation work — at least in one corner of Boston.

CHAPTER 6
School Community Advisory Councils: Los Angeles' Road Toward Citizen Involvement

Gerald Faris*

As long ago as the 1950s, a feeling began to take hold in the sprawling Los Angeles school community that the completely centralized administration, with a board of education "out there" somewhere calling most of the shots, was no longer meeting the needs of the people served by the educational system. A decade later, these convictions that the schools lacked a meaningful community voice resulted in people organizing loose, and characteristically changeable, advocacy groups that came to be called advisory councils. They were unlike the traditional PTAs functioning in virtually every school in the city already, because their focus was on the educational program — its content, effectiveness, and the competency of the staff carrying it out. In one group of schools — those in poverty areas and receiving federal assistance through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act — the councils were legally required by federal guidelines as vehicles for substantial parent involvement in school affairs. But in most Los Angeles schools where councils came into being, they were catch-as-catch-can affairs. Meetings were scheduled and publicized

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and whoever showed an interest in the neighborhood school and chose to attend was automatically a member of the council and entitled to vote. People came and went from month to month, but as is the pattern in most citizen groups, a solid core of leaders began to develop in each council.

Most commentators, including school officials, thought councils were theoretically a good way to involve citizens in public schools. But the pursuit of an ideal did not get councils off the ground. Their real reason for being was essentially political, for in 1968, the California legislature through the Miller Act declared that the Los Angeles system was too large and unwieldy and ought to be broken up into smaller units more responsive to the needs and wishes of the people. And in response to these pressures, the public schools began to decentralize, creating semi-autonomous administrative areas in the city with their own superintendents and citizen advisory councils. Decentralization had become a reality; the board itself determined how the councils should function. In a sense, the seed was then planted that later sprouted into the dilemma facing advisory councils: whether they are, in fact, viable vehicles for citizen involvement with authority to make decisions with teeth in them or whether they are "rubber stamps" for principals.

The board's official action formalizing advisory councils and establishing detailed and elaborate guidelines for them took place in the summer of 1971. By December 1, 89 percent of the schools had functioning councils. The board rule made clear that the councils were to be advisory and not substitutes for the principals or other administrative people. The term advising was defined as: "(1) inquiring; (2) informing; (3) suggesting; (4) recommending; and (5) evaluating." Suggested areas in which the councils might involve themselves included individualized instruction, innovative programs, curriculum, students' problems, counseling, grading policy, playground areas, developing a community school, dropout rates, programs for gifted students, and post-high school education.

How have things worked out? A year after the advisory councils were created, the school district evaluated 2,400 questionnaires returned by school principals, advisory council chairmen, and randomly elected council members including parents, teachers, a broad range of community people, secondary school students and non-teaching (classified) employees. Here are highlights:

- Evening council meetings, on a once a month basis, were most typical.
- Attendance was considerably less than the 25 or so the board recommended be on the council, with a range anywhere from 11 to the 25.
- Except for members of the council, generally less than 10 community people or school personnel attended.
- The majority felt councils were representative of their school communities.

• Parent and community involvement, however, was thought to be too low, and how to increase involvement was a first priority item.

• A need was expressed for training programs to increase the expertise and effectiveness of council members and chairpeople.

• Those who answered the survey questions indicated they felt most involved and most effective in identifying educational needs; they felt least effective in participating in the evaluation of the schools and their academic effectiveness, and in making recommendations to the superintendent for improvement.

The very existence of decentralization and advisory councils in Los Angeles is a step in the right direction, away from an unresponsive monolithic structure to one that is more community centered by definition. It extends an open, official invitation for a community voice in the school and provides a structure within which that voice may be heard. But it doesn't assure that the voice will be accorded anything more than a hearing, sometimes of the most cursory nature.

Some of the community people most involved in Los Angeles advisory councils in the beginning are the ones most turned off to them now. Councils lack authority, and there is no mandate for the schools to do anything the councils say the community wants them to do. The man who chaired the citizens' committee appointed by the board to create guidelines for the councils, public relations counsel Clive Hoffman, is one of those diappointed people: "We wanted the councils to have decision-making responsibilities, and the reason for our negative feelings about them now are simply these: the whole decision-making thing, the activities of the council and their success, are still on the shoulders of the principal. Most principals, except the enlightened ones, want only a council that supports them and what they want for the school; there is no way to get these people to be responsive. Those councils that have gotten new programs, changes in the grading system, human relations programs, have done so only because of the attitudes of the staffs."

Will Los Angeles councils ever have effective decision-making powers? Not if school officials can help it. In Los Angeles, clearly, the council experience has been a mixed one. Evaluations indicate that communication, not changing the face of the schools, is the major virtue of the councils. There are councils that reflect the futile side of the concept: one has been completely neutralized by an unsympathetic principal and rendered an empty exercise in holding meetings. Another, for example, spent an entire year fighting over by-laws. Still others have become arenas for community battles over political or social issues. But some councils — such as those at Miramonte and Westwood elementary schools — have worked well. These "successes" pinpoint areas of value in the advisory council concept.

Miramonte: The Poor Speak Out

The neighborhood is down but obviously not out. Not far away are poor communities that seem more abject than the one called Florence-

Firestone. Miramonte School – one of the largest elementary schools in the city with an enrollment of over 1,500 children – is the neighborhood education center, together with a junior high around the corner. Florence-Firestone is a combination of industrial plants, a business district, and homes. It was once White, then became Black, and is in the process of assimilating large numbers of Mexican-Americans. It is a neighborhood of small and old wooden or stucco homes, storefronts, some vacant lots, and, as a kind of overpowering landmark, the gigantic Goodyear rubber plant with lawns, trees, and huge, red-brick buildings.

In Florence-Firestone there is a marked absence of citizen groups of any kind, or community involvement. There is no community center, not even a motion picture theater. The one that used to be there closed because of vandalism. And a Saturday movie program at Miramonte – one project of the school's advisory council – failed for lack of interest. Because of this void, there are those, including Miramonte's principal and members of the council, who are working to turn the school into a focal point for the community. It already has a "lighted school" program where adults come to the campus during evening hours for a variety of occupation-oriented courses, and it is hoped that these facilities will be opened for social service activities, including those focused on housing and jobs.

The handsome Miramonte school plant, left over from earlier days, is dominated by a long beige main building with tile roof and ornate front lamps, set back from the street by a spacious lawn. Its rather subdued grandeur belies the fact that the people who move in and out of the community like a traveling theatrical troupe have incomes below the federal government's established poverty level. The school program is funded heavily by the United States government under the Elementary and Secondary Education Title I legislation. This has given Miramonte such things as extra staff, equipment and supplies, programs for the educationally handicapped, an EMR (education for the mentally retarded) program, pre-kindergarten, a unique ethnic study center, bilingual and bicultural activities, (a result of the influx of Spanish-speaking people into Florence-Firestone), a large library, tutoring, and parent education. The legislation also brought into being the school's community advisory council, organized in 1967 and regarded as the first council in the city school system. It was then, and continues to be, a vital component of the life of Miramonte for those reasons that make or break such councils: it has parents and community people interested in the school, and principals and staff who are willing to let the council exercise leadership and suggest policy for the school.

When the principal called a meeting to organize the council, its initial members were from the ranks of the PTA. From the start, the Miramonte council was interested in program and the methodology of teaching: how the curriculum was determined and presented, why the children of Miramonte were failing their classes, and why they

couldn't read properly or do math. As a Title I council, Miramonte's council emphasizes language arts (reading) and math. Advisory councils under the act are entrusted with the duty of passing on budgets for Title I activities, where there is a definite emphasis on parent involvement. This factor alone gives Title I councils more power than those in the rest of the city schools; but at the same time, this kind of authority requires an expertise and sophistication that council members in poverty communities, including Miramonte, don't always have.

The Miramonte council took a decisive role in the selection of the school's reading program, studying four or five before deciding on the one to adopt. And that one didn't please the principal, but he accepted it because the council wanted it. Even before the selection of this program, the reading scores at Miramonte showed fluctuations upward and there have been advances in reading, as measured by the district, since the formation of the school council. How much influence the council had in rising reading scores is an unanswerable question, but the Miramonte community feels encouraged. Math scores are another matter: they remain very low year by year.

From the beginning of the council there have been tangible results. For example, when parents objected to a teacher's language and attitude toward the children, there were meetings with the council, and with the principal, and the teacher was finally transferred. When Mexican-Americans began coming into the school community, the council saw a need for a Spanish class for English-speaking people and petitioned for it. The council also moved in a similar fashion to get more ESL (English as a Second Language) classes and more aides to assist teachers in the school. One council member agitated for a crossing guard at a dangerous street corner. He circulated petitions and got the problem aired on a television news program. Enough concern was generated that a crossing guard was provided. When it was felt that the school needed a sweeping machine to clean the campus, the council went to work to get it, and it didn't take no for an answer, in spite of a policy against making such equipment available for an elementary school. Council members succeeded in getting a high official of the district's maintenance office to visit the school, attend a council meeting, and in due time provide the sweeper.

The Miramonte council is composed almost completely of parents; far more, in fact, than the board guidelines for councils deem appropriate. It has 35 parents, one school aide, and one representative each of certificated and classified employees. The council is about two-thirds Latin, reflecting the change in the school population, and meetings are conducted bilingually with an ESL teacher at the school as translator. Minutes are kept in both languages. An open door policy is maintained and every interested parent and community person can attend council meetings and stand for election to the council. To make attendance easier, meetings are held on Saturdays and they are advertised in the neighborhood paper and through notices sent home with

the children and mailed directly to parents. As with the school itself, a major problem with the Miramonte council is transiency, although the school population is becoming less transient. Membership on the council is also in a constant state of flux, to the point that the president is constantly having to reiterate what the council is and what it does.

Miramonte's young Caucasian principal, Dr. Stuart Bernstein, works well with the council and says he wants the advisory group to have a significant voice in making decisions for the school.

The council confronted the staff over implementation of Early Childhood Education programs in the school. At the council's insistence the reluctant staff initiated the program. At the same time, he notes: "In the past, we have found that only the negative things, the big issues, have brought the people out. The more mundane concerns of the school haven't." He believes that the council — from lack of time or a feeling that it lacks the technical background — sometimes leaves key issues that it might well take up to the staff to deal with. The atmosphere of the council is one of frank and open discussion between council members and staff, and among council people themselves. They approach their work seriously and attentively. Meetings are orderly and businesslike. And council members have determination, tenacity and an unwillingness to be defeated. As one Black parent put it, "If anyone starts messin' with my child's education, I take care of it." The principal is willing to give the council as much rein as it will take: "I make no major alterations in courses, and bring in no new programs, without bringing it to the advisory council. And the council makes me stronger when I go to the district for things, because I feel I have the support and trust of the council."

Westwood Elementary School: Mutual Admiration

The advisory council of Westwood Elementary School, and its principal, Mrs. Winifred Fischer, are members of one great mutual admiration society — and therein lies the story of this school council's success. "We have a fantastic principal," says the council; "I have a fantastic council," says Mrs. Fischer. The day has yet to come when there is any kind of split, or even significant disagreement, between the council and the principal over anything: program, staff, or the school plant. The staff, which at first felt threatened by the council out of fear that it would be told how to do its job by amateurs, has come to accept the advisory group and work with it. From the principal's point of view, the council is creative, stimulating, and has allowed the school to move ahead faster than it would have without the impetus of a community group letting the educators who make key decisions know what it wants. Said Mrs. Fischer, "It makes for faster changes. The district sees that the council is backing me and I am able to move twice as fast as before." Because of the council, the school had individualized instruction before it might have. A method of teaching science through a problem solving approach was facilitated by the council, which provided the kits necessary for the program. A program in which minori-

ty students are bused to the school was expedited because the council backed it.

Mrs. Fischer's method of working with the council is a pragmatic one, but it falls just short of surrendering any authority. She is firm in her position that she is the principal and it is her job, not the council's, to make the final decisions for Westwood. "The council never hassles the teachers and it doesn't run the school," she said. "But if something is so very important to members of the council, it's up to me to adapt and tell the staff it's terribly important to the community. I listen to them and try to give them the school they want."

If Westwood shares with Miramonte a viable advisory council, the comparison stops there. The school is in a middle-class, suburban area of West Los Angeles within easy distance of the UCLA campus. Its students aren't poor and the advisory council is a fairly sophisticated body in which a few people tend to hold positions of leadership and do a good deal of the work. For the most part, though, the community — aside from those people with school age children — is indifferent to the school and its affairs, and finding non-parent community people to serve on the council always has been a problem.

The council came into being in the summer of 1969 after Mrs. Fischer, taking her cue from the board which was letting it be known that it wanted all schools to have advisory councils, called a community meeting in the Westwood auditorium. By-laws eventually adopted by the council made its purposes clear: to promote a cooperative effort between teachers, administrators and the community for a more effective school program, and to promote community-school dialogue on matters of common interest. It was to propose changes in the educational program when they were appropriate and to create a general atmosphere of free inquiry. The size of the council, elected annually at an open community meeting, was set at 15 — eight parents, the principal (who is a voting member by the council's choice), three teachers, and three community people not parents of children in the school.

At the outset, the council was unsure of what it was supposed to do, or what it would do, and not all of that confusion has been resolved. From the beginning, too, the council and the Westwood PTA have taken separate courses in the pursuit of goals that don't overlap. They have tended to complement one another, rather than produce antagonisms or jealousies. It is said that the major motive of some who have served on the council has been personal power and ego satisfaction, but the council always has worked for the good of the school and has strongly backed Mrs. Fischer in the knowledge that such backing gives her added leverage with established district powers. But the council, through all of this, has been acutely aware that it lacks any real power to do anything that the principal doesn't agree with. From a practical standpoint, this has not created problems, but it has left the council with a conviction that without Mrs. Fischer, its fortunes might have been much different.

During its life at Westwood, the council's enterprises have in-

cluded the publication of a directory of emergency services, and a catalog of parent volunteers with expertise in various fields – law, science, business, cooking – who are available to visit classes or take children on field trips. There has been a reluctance on the part of teachers to utilize any of these people, but they are there for the inviting. Early on, the council confronted the board over its requirement that council elections be held only in October. That rule eventually was lifted and the councils may hold elections when they choose, provided they are on an annual basis. And the council saw an opportunity to get a patch of green space on the heavily concreted school campus by moving a fence, 600 square feet of blacktop, and replacing them with grass. An architect on the council drew up the plan and it was proposed in writing to the district with the council agreeing, if necessary, to pay a portion of the estimated $3,000 to do the work. The council sponsored a learning lab in one room at the school. Staffed for three and a half hours daily by mothers the lab is stocked with games and has multi-level learning centers in science, literature and language arts. In addition, a standing council committee made up of fathers of Westwood children volunteer their time to construct educational aids used in classes.

Clearly, the council is first and foremost a positive weapon in the hands of the principal to get what she wants for the school. Having a community council behind something, particularly one with political savvy, is more convincing than a routine request that may come in with scores of other requests. What this means is that creating a council does not guarantee its success. The council is in a state of delicate balance with the principal of the school in which it is located, and if the council and the principal aren't in tune, then the council will be an unhappy group, meeting only because it has to.

But school councils such as Miramonte and Westwood can work. It is up to the school professionals, parents and citizens to make them work.

CHAPTER 7

The Lion and the Cricket: The Making of Militants in Crystal City, Texas

Herbert Hirsch* and Armando Gutierrez† with Santiago Hinomosa‡

We are like the cricket. The cricket is a very small insect. It is said that one night the King of Beasts, the great lion, heard the cricket yelling and making noise. The lion laughed at all the yelling the cricket was doing.

The lion said, "it is a shame to be King of the Insects. You have no power. Nothing to be proud of." He insulted the cricket's pride.

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The cricket challenged the lion to a fight to decide who was the strongest. And the King of Beasts was ready to swallow the cricket in one bite. The cricket got into the lion's ear. He tickled and he itched him. The lion started scratching with his claws to get the cricket out of his ear. And he bled himself to death! And the cricket won the battle.

Humble people, weak people, small people, who are surrounded by empires, have no other resort but the wisdom and strategy of the cricket.

We are a very meek people. We don't stand a chance against an empire. Though we are weak and small, the day is very close when this great giant, the United States, the King of the Beasts, with its economic strength, its political power, its ruling the world with the claws of the lion, will either give in to the cricket, or bleed himself to death by scratching his own ears. Raies Lopez Tijerina as quoted in Stan Steiner, *La Raza: The Mexican Americans*, p. 54.

Highway 83 runs north-south through the "winter garden" area of Texas. Forty miles south of Uvalde one can take a side trip to the "Spinach Capital of the World." Crystal City, Texas, county seat of Zavala County, lies in the southern part of the county. It is 120 miles from San Antonio, 395 miles from Dallas, 319 miles from Houston, 92 miles from Laredo, and 198 miles from Austin, the state capital. Despite its remoteness, Crystal City politics easily reach the state capital and even extend beyond the borders of the Lone Star State.

Crystal City is named for the crystal-clear springs that flow in that area of Texas. But neither the Popeye statue that welcomes visitors to the city, nor the springs that flow through it are the reasons for the present importance of Crystal City. Crystal City has become a symbol of liberation and revolution that is beginning to sweep all of south Texas and other states of the Southwest and California. It is here, in Crystal City, that the Chicano revolution has experienced one of its most important successes. Crystal City is now more than the "Spinach Capital of the World," it has become the political capital of the Chicano movement. The city has changed from a community dominated by the Anglo minority to a community governed by the Chicano majority.

Crystal City's history is tied closely to the history of the organizational efforts of the Chicanos. The town was formed as a result of the division of the Cross-S Ranch in 1910 by a group of Anglo businessmen who ruled the community until 1963 with an iron hand. Hiring legal or illegal Mexican immigrants to do the manual labor, Crystal City and most of the Southwest was built on the sweat of the Chicano. Yet, as with the rest of the Southwest, the social and economic conditions within which the Chicano was forced to exist have been appalling. In 1960, the average Chicano completed only a sixth grade education in Texas and a ninth grade education in California. The average income of employed men 14 years of age and over was $2,029 throughout the country, or less than half that of the Anglo. Many businesses and other

Anglo organizations did not allow the Chicano to use their services, and it was also difficult and uncomfortable for the Chicano to use institutions which were not part of their cultural heritage. For the Chicano to make use of institutions such as employment agencies, physicians, and especially bureaucratic Anglo organizations required an expertise not only in the English language, but also in knowing how to deal with Anglo clerks, secretaries, and other administrators and functionaries. Often the Chicano could not predict what Anglos would do in normal situations. In many cases the Chicano was likely to be called a "greaser" and thrown out of the institutions supposedly designed to serve the needs of the people.

Needs do not vanish simply because they are not met. These needs meant that Chicanos would have to create institutions of their own. Although overlooked by historians and political scientists, Chicano authors such as Miguel Tirado have demonstrated that the Chicano has a long history of formal organization dating back to the late 1800s. There are a variety of organizations in every Southwestern state and some in the Midwest. A glance at the actions taken by Chicanos in attempts to regain the lands stolen from them by the Anglo invader demonstrates the long tradition of action. Tirado analyzes the goals and directions of a variety of these groups, referring to some of the earliest as "mutualistas." These mutual benefit associations pooled the meager resources within the Chicano community to provide some form of economic assistance and provided a forum for the discussion of the social and political life of the community. Such diverse organizations as the Orden Hijos de America (1921), League of United Latin American Citizens (1929), and the Mexican Congress (1938) all worked to further the social and political standing of the Chicano community.

These organizations were largely self-sufficient and did not make major demands from the dominant Anglo political system. If a Chicano was in need of a job or medical care, the ethnic institutions could handle these needs. When it came, however, to securing land from a rich Anglo rancher, or improving working conditions and wages on the ranches, farms, and factories of the Anglo, the Chicano institutions were helpless. Under these circumstances, it became necessary for the individuals involved to make their demands directly to the dominant society's institutions. It was within this environment that the liberation of Crystal City began.

Dominated for fifty years by absentee landlords and exploitive Anglo businessmen, the raising of Chicano consciousness coincided with the rise of consciousness among other ethnic groups in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Anglo had maintained control for years through tactics such as denying jobs to Chicanos engaged in political activity and even overt terror on the part of formal groups (such as the Texas Rangers) and informal groups. The Anglo did not realize that the system of domination was beginning to crumble.

Crystal City's first organized protest occurred in 1960 over school

segregation. Led by Arnold Lopez, a Baptist minister, and Gerald Saldana, 500 Chicanos protested the overt discrimination. The protest soon failed, but a lesson was learned. The Chicano community discovered that they had the ability to do more than form mutual aid groups, and were ready to meet the challenge.

In 1962 with the aid of an Anglo newly arrived in town, Andrew Dickens, and the help of the Teamsters Union (which dominated the Del Monte Plant, the largest employer in the city) the people united again to urge the city government to undertake action to alleviate the problems of the Chicanos and to tax property equally. The Chicanos began to recruit and register people to vote — including paying poll taxes. Five Chicanos, Los Cinco Mexicanos, were elected to the city council. In a final rally the night before election, 2,000 people gathered to hear:

> *The gringos say they are not afraid of this election. They say they never worry until the day before the election, then they go out and buy the vote. "Give a Mexican a dollar and he will sell himself," they say. But this is no longer true.*
>
> *The Mexicano's eyes are open, and the price is higher now. The man who wants to buy a vote must pay liberty, respect, dignity, education for the children, a higher standard of living for all, and progressive government — that is the new price.*
>
> *We're going to have people there in the polling booth tomorrow to help you. Do not be afraid. . . . The victory we win tomorrow is here tonight. The Anglos know this now. More important, we know it too.*

The Chicanos won, but the victory was short lived. In 1965, the Anglos were able to reassert their power in a carefully constructed election victory. Yet, the lesson was again learned, that Chicanos could gain political power. The problem became how to keep it.

School Boycott

In 1969 a school walkout set off a chain of events which finally ended the Anglo domination of Crystal City. With backing of a majority of the community; the aid of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO); and the direct counsel and leadership of Jose Angel Gutierrez, a native son of Crystal City and the founder of MAYO and later of La Raza Unida Party; the students and parents of Crystal City began to organize. The immediate issue was the selection of cheerleaders who were usually chosen by a committee comprised of teachers appointed by the principal. The custom was to utilize a quota system under which three Anglo and one Chicano cheerleader were appointed. A student who was qualified for the position, Diana Palacios, was eliminated from consideration because the quota of "one Mexican" had already been filled. Students became upset at this clear act of discrimination. Two high school students, Severita Lara and Armando Trevino, presented John Lair, the high school principal, with a petition

decrying the under-representation of Chicanos in school offices. After the presentation of the petition to the principal, and his rejection of it, the students took their petition to the superintendent, John Billings, who settled the issue by a compromise, i.e., there would be six cheerleaders, three Chicano and three Anglo. This was still greatly out of proportion to the actual numbers of students in the school, and was not satisfactory to the Chicano students who presented additional demands regarding unequal opportunities given to Chicanos to hold other offices such as class favorite, homecoming queen, etc. The Anglos reacted. They were concerned with the blatant display of "uppityness" on the part of the students and expressed their displeasure over the superintendent's allowing the "Mexican-Americans to get out of hand by their unusual demands." Superintendent Billings was reprimanded for his willingness to consider the petition, while the Mexican-American graduating seniors were made to believe that they wouldn't be graduating at all if they continued their protest activity. For the present, both Billings and the students backed away from further confrontation.

Over the summer months plans for a boycott of the school were discussed by students. The Anglos, threatened by the Chicanos' activity, set about structuring further controls to bar Chicanos from any participation in school activities. The Ex-Students Association, composed of Anglos, decided that in order to run for homecoming queen, an office sponsored by their organization, at least one parent of the student had to have graduated from high school in Crystal City. Few Chicanos had finished high school. Thus, when the fall term began, ballots were distributed for the nominations with the "grandfather clause" included, and permission was given to the Ex-Students Association to hold the crowning ceremonies in the football field. As a result of this plan only six Chicano girls qualified.

Students who then published a leaflet protesting this exclusion were suspended from school. Severita Lara became the first professed dissenter of the group and was soon joined by Libby Serna, Diana Serna, and Mario Trevino. Joined by about 40 other students, this group went to the school board meeting on the second Monday in October 1969 to make their demands.

Careful plans were made before the students presented their arguments to the school board. At this point, community adults supported the students. Jose Angel Gutierrez, who had been involved in Crystal City politics since the elections of 1963, returned home after earning an M.A. in government. Utilizing Gutierrez' experience with the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), and with the help of MAYO, the students initiated their school protest with a solid organizational base. One observer noted that Gutierrez was "quick to point out that the effort in Crystal City was not a MAYO undertaking: it originated with the local people, students, and their parents . . . nevertheless, MAYO is here to do what it can to help the walkout and its related activities." Gutierrez's contribution was to make sure that

the students' initiative rekindled the once brightly burning parent enthusiasm. With strong leadership in both the school and the community, the students presented another list of grievances to school board officials on November 10, 1969. The students threatened to disrupt the ceremony of the homecoming queen's crowning due to the discriminatory manner of selection. After additional pressure, and Gutierrez's assertion that protest would occur at the game if the school board did not take action, the board revoked the permission they had previously given to the Ex-Students Association to use the field. The school board was now caving in under the unrelenting pressure — the cricket was beginning to draw the lion's blood. The board decided to postpone any other decisions until December in the hope that the delay would allow the movement's momentum to die.

The pressure of the impending school board decision created a tense situation in both the Anglo and Chicano communities. The Chicanos, however, took active steps to channel the pent up energy into additional campaigns, and the two groups became even more deeply polarized. Finally, on December 8, 1969, the school board reached its long-awaited decision with three members of the board absent. They decided that the discrimination claimed by the Chicanos did not exist, and that " . . . after a careful study of the petition no instances of discrimination were found, and as many of these matters are administrative, the board would take no action." The students drew up another list of grievances and presented them to the school board along with a final notice declaring that if no action was taken the students would organize and walk out. On December 9, 1969 the junior and senior high students walked out of the Crystal City schools. By the end of the day, about 500 students had walked out, with parents standing by to prevent injury. On the second day of the walkout a march involving about 700 people was held to demonstrate that the Chicanos were well aware of the years of discrimination to which they had been subject in their city's schools. On December 15 the elementary grades joined the strikers and left the school. Chicano adults contributed food to the protestors; one rancher donated a steer to the students. School attendance fell to virtually zero.

Some people in the community feared that violence might occur from the confrontation, and representatives of the Texas Education Agency were asked to come to Crystal City to speak to the parents of the striking students and to the school board in order to negotiate some type of compromise settlement. The students, however, would have none of it; they believed the board should talk directly to them. The students also feared their parents might lose their jobs and be intimidated by the Anglos. One student said that "most parents speak little English and students are afraid the board would try to play a trick on them."

At the students' insistence, the parents refused to attend the school board meeting and stood solidly beside their children. A further attempt to mediate the dispute was made by then Senator Ralph Yar-

borough who arranged in the last week of December to have Severita Lara, Diana Serna, and Mario Trevino flown to Washington to meet with Congressman George Bush, Senator Edward Kennedy, and Department of Health, Education and Welfare and Department of Justice officials. As a consequence of the students' visit to Washington, two mediators from the Justice Department were sent to meet with the school board and the students to discuss a settlement. As an end result of these extensive talks, the school board gave in on nearly every issue and no disciplinary action was taken against any of the students involved in the walkout. The students had won.

The victory, however, did not mean the death of the movement. Actually, it had just started. Jose Angel Gutierrez knew that the base to build a movement dedicated to Chicano control of their own institutions had been laid. He noted that:

> *. . . people began seeing that more and more they didn't want to be Anglos. At the beginning, I am almost convinced that the goal was, you know, that we want to make the scene better because we want to be just like the Anglos. We want equal education, but right next to Anglos. Somewhere along the line, because of the experiences of the people that they had seen for a long time and had known for a long time, at least they thought, those kinds of images exploded . . .*

La Raza Unida

With the students' success and unity achieved among Chicano families the idea of an independent third party became a prime concern. After weeks of consultation and legal advice, La Raza Unida Party was organized on January 17, 1970. A petition signed by 88 registered voters in Zavala County (three percent of the previous general election) was submitted to County Judge Irl Taylor. The city council and school board elections, due to be held that spring, were to be the first test for the new party. Elections, however, were not to be the only test faced by La Raza Unida. Numerous legal battles lay ahead.

The party won its first legal test after one of its candidates, Pablo Puente, was barred from the city council race due to the fact that he did not own property — specifically real estate. This provision was ruled unconstitutional in U.S. District Court, and Puente and the other La Raza Unida candidates won the election in a strong show of Chicano voting strength. The victory was only partial, however, for only two of the five council seats and three of the seven school board seats had been contested in the election. After the first takeover in 1963, the city council had revised its charter to institute staggered elections. These changes made it impossible for the Chicanos to take over in one sweep as in 1963. In short, the change meant that the Chicanos would have to be able to maintain their mobilization for two years. The Chicanos, however, had learned their lesson well — the lion could not dislodge the cricket so easily. A glance at the voter turnout figures illustrates the mobilization which had occurred. A total of 3,100 people were legally registered to vote in the Crystal City school district. Of this

total, 2,544 voters actually went to the polls. Prior to the 1970 election, the largest voter turnout in a school board election had been 1,705 in 1963. In the city council election a total of 2,222 people cast ballots. This total compares with the previous year's high of only 1,619 votes.

During the campaign, the Anglo leadership seemed to believe that if they were too vocal in their opposition to La Raza Unida, it would only serve to mobilize even more Chicanos. The Anglo-owned newspaper, the *Zavala County Sentinel*, ran a short, terse editorial which only vaguely alluded to the negative effects that would result from the election of the Chicano candidates. This tactic was in sharp contrast to the newspaper's stinging front page editorials which had appeared in the four previous elections. Three earlier editorials warned ominously of the disaster which would befall the community if non-business candidates were to win. Only one local business group saw fit to issue a similar warning. A large bilingual ad was placed in the paper which extolled the need for industry to improve the economic conditions of Crystal City. In addition, the advertisement warned that:

> *Industry officials seek a community with harmonious relations and a stable government. They avoid areas where there is agitation by militant groups which would hinder their progress. The working people in Crystal City hurt themselves when they vote for candidates for the school board and city council who are associated with militant groups that are unfriendly to industry.*

The threat in the ad implied that new industry would be discouraged from moving to Crystal City and that perhaps industry such as the huge Del Monte plant just outside the city would close up and leave. This fear had some basis in fact — after the 1963 election a local packing shed had moved to a nearby community. Considering that 10 percent of the total labor force in the county is engaged in manufacturing and another 26 percent in agriculture (with a good portion of these working for Del Monte), it is not surprising that the possibility of such a closing would be considered by the Anglos to be a formidable obstacle for the La Raza Unida candidates to overcome. The tactic did not succeed. The Chicanos won and succeeded in developing a new consciousness. The idea that one could indeed affect the political environment had spread from a small core of activists to the people in general. The hope of the party's organizers was now to spread to other south Texas communities.

That such "Chicano consciousness" could be exported was already becoming clear. In nearby Cotulla and Carrizo Springs the fever of Crystal City had already spread, and in those communities' elections Raza Unida candidates had also been elected. These victories were truly remarkable since neither community had been mobilized through a school boycott as in Crystal City. In addition, no "professional" organization work had been carried out. Yet both communities were able to follow the lead of Crystal City and elect Chicano candidates.

La Raza Unida organizers hoped to move the party into the three-county area of Zavala, Dimmit, and LaSalle for the general elections in the fall of 1970. A controversy arose, however, regarding the legality of the petitions which called for the placing of the LRUP on the ballot. Attorney General Crawford Martin gave one opinion regarding the legality of the party and Secretary of State Bob Bullock gave another. Finally, on July 27, 1970, the party filed suit for a writ of mandamus in the Texas Supreme Court. The suit, however, was transferred to the Fourth District Court of Civil Appeals.

After almost a month of waiting, the party received a negative judgment from the Court of Appeals. At this point the appeal was taken to the Texas Supreme Court. In each county, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the lower court. In Zavala County it was pointed out that the petition asking for the party to be placed on the ballot was dated "1969." Thus, it was questionable whether or not the signatures on the petition were those of currently registered voters. In the case of Dimmit County, ten of the signatures on the petition were found to have voted in the Democratic primary in May (an act which disqualified them from signing the LRUP's petition). With the disqualification of these signatures, the petition was five names short of the required number. Finally, La Salle County's petition was disqualified on the grounds that the party's lawyers had not shown adequate proof that precinct conventions had actually been held to secure the signatures on the petition. All of the counties' ballots were thus without the name of La Raza Unida Party.

Though discouraged by the high court's ruling, the party began a mobilization drive for a write-in campaign. Although such a tactic was not likely to be successful, especially considering the low level of Chicanos' education, the threat of La Raza Unida Party to the established Democratic Party had already seemed real enough. In a letter to a prominent Mexican-American citizen, Zavala County Judge Irl Taylor warned that the county's citizenry, both White and Brown, must join together to defeat the "hate peddlers and militant group." In his call for a straight Democratic ticket vote, Judge Taylor accused the Chicano organizers of working only for their own glory and to line their own pockets.

While it is doubtful that this particular letter had any adverse affects on the Chicano citizenry, either in the city or county-wide elections, the write-in campaign did fail. La Raza Unida Party contested the election on the grounds that a variety of irregularities and violations of the election code had been committed. One example of the "questionable" nature of some of the practices is the case of Jose Serna, candidate for County Commissioner. As a result of a vigorous effort on his part, Mr. Serna received more than enough votes to win his election. Since his name was written-in his numerical victory was thrown out on the technicality that the spelling of his name by the voters varied in six different ways. Thus, his vote distribution varied in the following manner:

Jose Serna	51
Joe Serna	48
Jose Cerna	33
Joe Cerna	39
J. Serna	38
J. Cerna	15
	224

Serna's opponent, Mildred Keller, had a total of 119 and won the election. As Jose Angel Gutierrez tersely stated, "It was the first time the gringo could tell the difference between one Mexican and another."

Raza Unida's appeal was thrown out of district court because of a technical error in the filing of the appeal. No amending of the appeal was allowed. At this point the party's funds had been expended and further appeals were impossible.

Regardless of the outcome of these elections, visibility for the party remained high. In addition, because of the changes which were rapidly being implemented within the city government and within the schools, there was a rapid movement of Anglos out of the city. By the spring of 1971 nearly two-thirds of all the Anglo families had moved out of Crystal City. Thus, in the spring's city council and school board elections La Raza Unida Party completed its sweep of local government. While the party had been dealt a blow by the previous negative rulings of the Texas courts, the battle was by no means over.

Changes in the Schools

The changes which have occurred in Crystal City since this complete takeover have been far reaching. In the schools bilingual education programs have been instituted, as has a free breakfast program. Throughout the schools a program of bicultural education has been put into operation (a critical move in enhancing Chicanos' self-esteem and thus lowering the dropout rate). In addition, the make-up of the faculty and administrative staffs has changed profoundly. The most important administrative positions (principal, assistant principal, school superintendent, etc.) have all been staffed by Chicanos sympathetic to and understanding of the needs of the student body. All teachers in the schools are bilingual, and Mexican-American teachers actually constitute a majority. The school district is also much more aware of and willing to search out and accept federal aid. Money has been received from a variety of public and private agencies. Moreover, the district has banned army recruiters from the schools and made school records private. As a result, the Selective Service System — which Chicanos often fear and distrust — has not been able to operate as it once did.

Even the school band has been affected by the success of La Raza Unida Party. The band has taken on a Chicano image and is now seen at football half-times spelling out "Chicano" and "Raza" to the tune of "Jalisco" and "De Colores." The band has been invited to schools throughout the state to demonstrate its unique Chicano sound.

The changes in the schools were vigorously criticized by Anglos both from Crystal City and throughout the state. The cry of "racism in reverse" was quick to be made as was the accusation that Crystal City's schools were no longer offering a first-rate education for the children — White or Brown. According to these critics, certified teachers were being replaced by untrained instructors who had no other qualification than that they had supported La Raza Unida's political efforts. A suit was brought against the school system and its officials by several Anglos for "racist" hiring and firing practices. Perhaps the best commentary on these criticisms is that (1) the suit was unsuccessful, and (2) schools throughout the state as well as several from out-of-state have sent representatives to Crystal City to study its school program, with particular emphasis on the bilingual-bicultural education program, in order to obtain ideas for their own school systems.

Outside the school system, important changes have also occurred. Training programs for city staff and for police have greatly increased the efficiency and quality of these forces. Programs to extend sewage and water facilities to areas of the city long neglected have been put into operation. A concerted effort is being made to attract industry to the city. This is a most crucial variable to the future of Crystal City. With the continued mechanization of so many farms, more and more migrants are being lured to the large urban centers in search of work. Crystal City hopes to attract industry to keep the migrants in the city. As yet, this particular dimension is unresolved. The competition for industry is, of course, quite widespread.

In addition, Chicanos have finally taken over union activities in the Del Monte plant in Crystal City. The Teamsters had a sweetheart contract with the plant which was to expire in September 1970. Chicano efforts to create their own union and oust the Teamsters in that year failed due to a technicality in the filing of the new union's petition. The new Teamster contract, however, expired in September 1973. This time the Chicano union was not to be "tricked." After three years of waiting for a second chance, the Chicano workers finally had their own union. The Teamsters were overwhelmingly defeated.

Even the Chicanos' traditional nemesis, the Texas Rangers, have felt the impact of La Raza Unida's successes. Crystal City has passed an ordinance which does not allow the Rangers to operate as an official law enforcement agency on anything other than state property. Thus, while they may patrol the highway that runs through the city, they are not allowed on city streets. In addition, the Rangers encountered such antagonism in nearby Cotulla that they were forced to move their regional office to the safer confines of San Antonio.

Beyond these questions of policy selection and program implementation, however, lies the more fundamental and profound problem of securing control. The goal of Crystal City's organizers was to do more than take over one town. Since La Raza Unida's initial successes, the party's popularity is spreading rapidly throughout the Southwest

and beyond. At present La Raza Unida Party has branches in Texas, Colorado, California, Arizona, Washington, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Illinois, Ohio and Michigan.

In Texas, the ascendancy of the party has been noteworthy. A variety of communities have taken up the Raza Unida banner and run candidates for numerous positions. Among the communities which have elected Raza Unida-backed candidates are La Sara, Lyford, Cotulla, La Joya, Uvalde, Elsa, San Juan, Robstown, and Mathis. That this number will increase and spread to other communities in the next few years seems to be a matter of course. It is even a distinct possibility that several La Raza Unida candidates will make it to the Texas State House. Thus, Crystal City's community organizing efforts, beginning with the school boycott, have indeed become the starting point of a developing Chicano consciousness among the masses of Mexican-Americans.

Perhaps the most ambitious, and undoubtedly the most profound, activity remains focussed on Crystal City and Zavala County which came under complete Raza Unida control in the Spring of 1975. Despite this consolidation of political control, economic difficulties remain. In fact, Chicano powerlessness has its base in the absence of control of the economic resources of South Texas.

In Zavala County sixteen people and/or corporations own 96 percent of the land (none of these land owners are Chicanos). Thus, while the economic potential of the area is substantial in that it supplies nearly half of the nation's onions and spinach and a variety of other vegetables and fruit, the people who live in Crystal City and Zavala County do not directly benefit. It is likely that many of the economic related problems would be well on their way to resolution if the indigenous residents of the area reaped the gains from the fertile land.

Under the leadership of Jose Angel Gutierrez, who is now County Judge of Zavala County, a program to secure control of the land has been started. Several tactics are to be utilized. First, the county is attempting to buy the land from its absentee owners. Second, the county is approaching the owners with the idea of leasing the land. Third, the tax structure of the county, which under Anglo domination gave a variety of tax breaks to the land owners, is being changed so as to have at least two potential consequences. On the one hand it is hoped that higher taxes will compel some owners to sell or lease, and on the other, the increased revenue from higher taxes can be put to work for the community. Fourth, and the most ambitious, is for the county to take the land through the use of eminent domain. This concept allows a governmental unit to force owners to sell if it is declared in the "public welfare" to do so. The County intends to argue that, given the economic condition of its residents, it is clearly in the "public welfare" to take the land. Preliminary legal research has shown that no court in the state of Texas has ever decided against the governmental unit and for the individual. The profound ramifications of a successful effort by the county government to secure the land in this manner is clearly evi-

dent. The political, social, and economic shock waves would have staggering implications for the entire system of private ownership of land.

In the long run, then, what began as a rather modest task, centering around the question of whether Chicanos had good enough legs to be cheerleaders, might have consequences far beyond those anticipated by the local organizers. To focus attention on lack of control of resources of production as the primary cause of Chicano powerlessness is to focus on the roots of United States' society and its rigid system of stratification. The consciousness that such a focus might eventually foster, not only among Chicanos but also among other powerless peoples, might be more irritation than the lion could bear! The beast could well fall.

CHAPTER 8
Indian Parents Strive for Community Control: The Story of Three Indian Schools

Kirke Kickingbird* and Lynn Shelby†

We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges . . . But you, who are wise, must know that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will, therefore, not take it amiss if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it. Several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but when they

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came back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the wooas, unable to bear either cold or hunger, knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, nor kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were, therefore, totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them. [*American State Papers (Indian Affairs, Class II, Vol. 1) (1789-1815) p. 144*]

This reply from chiefs of the Six Nations was made to the Governor of Virginia during the Treaty of Lancaster in 1744, when the Virginia Commissioners offered to educate six of the chiefs' sons at a college in Williamsburg, Virginia. The Europeans' educational system was intended to preserve their culture and society. The Indians rejected that European-American system for the same reasons. But like some collective Prometheus, the Euro-Americans were determined to bring not fire, but education to the American Indians. While Prometheus was tortured by the gods of Olympus for bringing the gift of fire to men, the situation was not the same when the Europeans brought education to the Indians. It was the recipients, not the benefactors, who suffered the tortures. The planners and administrators of American Indian policy would set forth with missionary zeal to bring the "habits and arts of civilization" to the savages through education. Though the Indians rejected the educational system time and again as the spokesman for the Six Nations had done, and though the Indians attempted to adapt the white system of education to their needs, the whites insisted that only their methods of education would work. Indians have gained little satisfaction from being able to say, "I told you so."

Despite the fact that many Indian leaders made clear that they did not "esteem the kind of learning taught" in the white educational system, the whites failed to listen; or having listened, failed to hear; or having heard, failed to believe. By the 1890s, there was little reason to listen. The tribes had moved to lands reserved for their own use in return for certain payments from the U.S. under treaty agreements. Instead of acting as a liaison officer between the United States and the tribes, the Indian agent had become an autocrat with military troops to back up his edicts. With the slaughter of Sioux families at Wounded Knee in December of 1890 and the nominal end of Indian wars, repression of the Indian governments became a matter of course. The reservations become more like prison camps than final, free reserved homelands as promised.

The education of young Indians suffered drastically. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Cherokee/Choctaw school systems were responsible for an adult literacy rate of 60 percent and a tribal pride in the schooling of children. Everything changed when federal

authorities replaced the tribal and missionary system with their own day and boarding schools. By 1909, a special U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education reported a literacy rate of 40 percent for Cherokee adults, a public school dropout rate of 75 percent, and an education level below average for Oklahoma and below the average of rural and non-white of the state. The decline of Cherokee education symbolized the direction and impact of federal policy throughout the country, as report after report, and re-organization act after re-organization act over the course of this century prevented Indian parents from having direct say in the education of their children.

Community control as an educational concept for Indian communities has re-emerged only recently. The first instance of these reforms in recent years took place in a small Navajo community at Rough Rock, Arizona in 1966.

A group of concerned parents, teachers and administrators, discouraged by the high dropout rates and poor achievement levels of the Navajo youngsters, developed plans for a community school, whereby parents would serve as teacher aides and counselors teaching Navajo language and culture. The Rough Rock community formed an all-Indian school board, which set out to negotiate with the Navajo Tribe (which was very supportive) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to take over the local school. This board also oversaw the development of a new and culturally relevant curriculum.

Although the efforts of the Rough Rock parents were gaining momentum, no other community control movements were initiated until 1969. The lapse of three years is most likely attributable to the BIA's hesitancy and unwillingness to turn over its own federal school system to local Indian parents. However, the influx of community controlled funds resulting from the federal poverty monies of the 1960s and the mandates set forth in President Nixon's Special Message on Indian Affairs in July 1970 began to make a difference. The President outlined a policy for Indian self-determination and local control of programs and monies which included specific educational policy recommendations:

> *One of the saddest aspects of Indian life in the United States is the low quality of Indian education. Drop-out rates for Indians are twice the national average, and the average educational level for all Indians under Federal supervision is less than six school years. Again, at least a part of the problem stems from the fact that the Federal government is trying to do for Indians what many Indians could do better for themselves.*
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> *Consistent with our policy that the Indian community should have the right to take over the control and operation of federally funded programs, we believe every Indian community wishing to do so should be able to control its own Indian schools. This control would be exercised by school boards selected by Indians and functioning much like other school boards throughout the nation.*

In 1969, almost simultaneously, three Indian communities — at Ramah, New Mexico; Wind River, Wyoming; and Rocky Boys, Mon-

tana – took steps to put the President's message into action by creating community-run schools. In all instances, the Indian parents complained of high dropout rates, disciplinary problems, poor achievement levels, and high degrees of discrimination in the surrounding non-Indian communities. The Sioux communities of Pine Ridge and Rosebud were also contemplating the movement toward community control.

In 1970, a group of Indian parents (Birgil Kill Straight and Gerald Clifford, both Oglala Sioux; Abe Plummer, a Navajo; Barbara Sage and Al Redman, Arapaho from Wind River; and Sylvester Knows Gun and Ted Rising Sun of the Cheyenne community at Busby and Lame Deer, Montana) came to Washington, D.C. to discuss with James Hawkins, then Director of BIA Education, the concept of Indian community control. The group had submitted four proposals to the BIA requesting either planning or operational funds for community schools. Confronted with bureaucratic excuses and indecision, they sought the assistance of national legislators on Capitol Hill.

The parents' claims were so stirring that a group of legislative assistants on the Hill formed a Committee of Congressional Aides. This committee exerted pressure on the bureaucracies (especially the BIA) who were thwarting the parents' efforts. The bureaucracies began to consider these Indian communities' requests for their own schools.

This Indian parent initiative led to the establishment of three community schools which will be discussed in this chapter. They are three examples of a growing "alternative" Indian community school movement. Only 20 such schools exist across the country. Their children number approximately 1400, not counting the 300 who attend community-run higher educational centers on reservations. These numbers are small when compared to national figures. There are nearly 300,000 Indian school age children in this country. Three-fourths attend public schools; almost all of the remaining children attend private and mission schools, and federal day and boarding schools administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In light of the history of Indian education, these schools support President Nixon's special message that Indian parents "could do better for themselves."

Ramah Navajo High School

The Navajo Reservation is located in the northeast corner of Arizona where Arizona, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico meet. With 24,141 square miles and 125,000 tribal members, it constitutes the largest Indian reservation in the country, and compares in size to the state of West Virginia. Along the eastern border of the reservation the ownership pattern changes so that there are alternating parcels of land owned by Indians and non-Indians. This is referred to as the "checkerboard area." In this area about 45 miles southeast of Gallup and 135 miles west of Albuquerque, sits the town of Ramah, New Mexico.

Perhaps the most striking feature is that there is a community at all. Outside of Ramah the Navajos live in hogans. These traditional homes don't include electricity or running water. Most of the people who live in Ramah own or work on the small ranches in the area. Those who do not work on the ranches and farms may have jobs in Gallup or Albuquerque. The work is generally of the sporadic, low paying, semi-skilled variety. The dry farming crop is corn and the ranches raise cattle and sheep. Some of the Navajo people are silversmiths and rug weavers. While the Indian families are large, ranging from 5 to 16 children, Ramah itself has a population of only 1,500, most of whom are white and Mormon.

The Gallup-McKinley school district had charge of Ramah High School until 1968. In that year, the county school board concluded that it was financially unfeasible to continue the school at Ramah. The Navajo people at Ramah had the choice of sending their children to the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools or bussing them to a consolidated public school some 30 miles away. The Gallup-McKinley school district initially agreed to provide transportation and then found a number of reasons not to do so. A staff attorney for the Navajo legal services unit, Dinebeiina Nahiilna be Agaditahe (DNA), had filed suit at the parents' request to keep the school open. The suit was not successful but a second suit to force the school district to maintain bus transportation was. Still, it clearly was not what the community wanted. The Navajo parents were concerned that their children had to travel long distances to attend the federal boarding schools or the public consolidated school. The boarding school merely continued a pattern of the last hundred years in Indian education. In the winter, travel conditions were especially hazardous when the long distances were combined with bad weather conditions. When the students started to attend the schools away from home, the dropout rate began to climb. The children's dislike for schooling away from home began to manifest itself in asocial behavior at the schools and at home. Mormons purchased the building when the public school closed. The Navajo parents decided it would be a good place to establish their own school system for their children.

The Navajo community at Ramah elected a five person school board. It consisted of Juan Martinez, the first chairman; Bessie Begay, Secretary-Treasurer; Bertha Lorenzo, Abe Plummer and Chavez Coho. Mrs. Lorenzo, a housewife and mother without any formal education, spearheaded much of the effort to establish the school. Mr. Plummer did have formal education consisting of a B.A. in elementary education from Northern Arizona University. Mrs. Lorenzo and Mr. Plummer were the only two who spoke English. The parents clearly saw the problems of the children in the existing non-Indian school systems both federal and public. The children were discipline problems in both kinds of schools and at home. There was a great deficiency in basic skills such as reading, math, and language. There were large numbers of runaways and dropouts. More than anything else, the

parents wanted their children home.

To establish the school, the Navajo school board needed help and they received it from several sources. The Shaker Foundation provided them with a small grant to get started. The Indian board contacted the Office of American Affairs in the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) for technical assistance. Next, they were referred to the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation who sent them to Don Olson. Olson was a Navajo-speaking former VISTA volunteer who had spent three years at Ramah. Mike Gross, the DNA attorney who had initially filed the lawsuits for Ramah to keep the school open and buses running, left DNA to work full-time for Ramah's Indian School board. These two men met with the community and school board to discuss the type of school they wanted and the legal procedures and bureaucratic processes necessary to achieve the desired type of school.

The parents and school board already had a concept of the new school and what they wanted from the curriculum. The school was to emphasize Navajo culture. The curriculum was to provide vocational skills training centered on jobs related to the community, reading and language development in both Navajo and English, basic mathematical skills, and a place for Indian arts such as basketmaking and weaving.

To finance school operations, the board decided on a contract school arrangement. The community, through the tribe, would contract with the BIA to operate the facility. The Indian community would lease the Mormon-owned former public school facility. The board members went to Washington where they sought to negotiate an agreeable contract with the BIA. The Ramah Indian School board conceived the idea of a tuition rebate system. The BIA would determine how much it was spending for each Ramah student presently in boarding and public schools and provide the Ramah Indian School with the same amount to operate their own school. Refusing to take "no" from BIA personnel for an answer, the Ramah board went to Capitol Hill to gain congressional support. After three trips to Washington, D.C. the pressure on the bureaucrats built up sufficiently for a contract to be negotiated successfully in the fall of 1970. The nearly 170 students could come home. Ramah students did come home, and by the 1973-74 school year, the school was in full stride, with its first full-time principal in office.

Rocky Boys School

Situated in the midst of the Bear Paw Mountains of northeastern Montana is the Rocky Boys Reservation of Chippewa and Cree Indians, population 1,000. The Indian people of Rocky Boys are generally poor, most of them living on a subsistence economy of stock raising. Some people work in the cities of Great Falls and Havre, the kind of cities where Indians were accustomed to signs such as "No Dogs and Indians Allowed," not too many years ago.

Discontent was brewing among the Indian parents on the Rocky

Boys Reservation for years about the conditions under which their youngsters were being educated. In the late sixties, the high incidence of dropouts and disciplinary problems combined with the high degree of prejudice and discrimination against Indians in the public school district of the nearby town, Havre, where the Chippewa-Cree students in the community attended school, reached a critical peak. They had had only five high school graduates in ten years. Something had to be done.

Most of the children in the community had attended the public schools since 1959 when the BIA decided to end its responsibility for education on the reservation. Problem students in the community had been traditionally sent to BIA boarding schools at Busby and in other states. Indian parents wanted to create an independent public school district on their reservation so that a community-relevant curriculum could be developed to interest their children in receiving an education.

Parents led by Dorothy Small and Alice Russett, both housewives, organized a community meeting where the parents and community members voted on whether they wanted to become an independent public school system or not. They did. Mrs. Small and Mrs. Russett contacted Leland Pond, an Assiniboine law student, to investigate the legality of beginning a public school district and to work with the parents of the community.

During the preliminary part of the negotiations with the Havre Public School District No. 16 and the State Department of Education, the tribal council at Rocky Boys would not support the parents' efforts. As a result, no help was forthcoming from the BIA.

Additional assistance was needed. Mrs. Small contacted the Office of American Indian Affairs in the USOE for assistance. She was referred to the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation which responded by sending a husband-wife team, Sandy and Dave Robinson, with education and legal experience, to assist the community. The Robinsons incorporated the local education committee of parents and went to foundations for support. The Elliott Foundation of New York came through with the first $5,000. In the meantime the Robinsons studied the legal processes required to make the change, and the educational committee, led by Mrs. Small, worked hard to gain the support of other members of the tribe.

Mrs. Small, aided by Mrs. Robinson, arranged for a hearing with the Havre Public School District to get permission to become a separate district. Knowing that the school board's chief argument against separation would be the Rocky Boys community's inability to finance their own district, the two women and the educational committee sought funds prior to the hearing. They contacted the BIA, which finally endorsed the idea and sent a telegram to the tribe pledging financial support. In like manner, they attempted to get the support of the U.S. Commissioner of Education, then James Allen. Through the Office of American Indian Affairs an initial commitment was made to the parents when they made a personal visit to the Commissioner of

Education in Washington. In the end, however, Dr. Allen refused to send a telegram of support because he felt that it would interfere with states' rights. A telegram of endorsement from USOE was finally sent by the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare who supported the concept on the basis of the Nixon Indian Message of 1970 and pledged $35,000 in funds.

The next step was to obtain the budget details from the State of Montana about the federal, state, and county funds which supported the Indian students from Rocky Boys who attended the Havre Public School District. Because most public schools are reimbursed by the state after they have made expenditures, they needed a funding base from which to work. When they learned that federal and state funds would amount to $35,000, they successfully set out to raise additional money from the S & H Greenstamp Foundation, the Great Western Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Playboy Foundation.

After the financial commitment was demonstrated, permission was granted by the local school district for the Indian community to set up their school. The next obstacle to overcome was a state hearing. To hold such a hearing would mean that the members of the organization would have to show their support *en masse* for the separate school district. Many of the parents who worked for the tribe and the BIA were afraid to take time off from work. Mrs. Small negotiated with the tribe and the local BIA agency to declare a half-day holiday on the day of the hearing. The next problem to be solved was transportation to and from the hearing. Most of the people could not afford to travel to the state capitol at Helena. She first requested use of school buses of the Havre school district and was refused. Then she sought the assistance of a local church and was granted the use of their buses. With all stumbling blocks removed, the Indian parents went to the hearing and met with success.

After the successful state hearing and Indian community victory, the educational committee of the Rocky Boys Reservation gained the support of the tribal government. The Indian parents achieved a resounding victory. Rocky Boys Public School District No. 7 opened its doors in September 1970.

Winning the fight to form a separate public school district was an important step for many leaders of the parent movement who had little more than a fifth grade education themselves. Few of them had ever been to their state capitol, none of them had legally fought the local school board at Havre, or had ever been to Washington, D.C. With a determination that would put PTA's and school boards of most middle class communities to shame, the parents of the Rocky Boys Reservation won a very important battle — local control of their children's education.

Bert Corcoran, a member of the community who became the first superintendent of the school district, proved to be a good choice. Meeting repeatedly as they did before the battle was won, the all-

Indian school board decided upon educational guidelines to be used in the schools. The community decided on an environmental and ecological approach to education — one which would incorporate many of the traditions of the tribe into the curriculum. Old people of the tribe were used as resource persons and the Cree language was taught along with basic English language arts. Believing that a closer relationship between the parents, teachers, and the students was important, class sizes were reduced, and teachers were required to spend time working in the community. The school itself serves as a community center where both adults and children can learn. Rather than standing apart from the community, the school and its teachers have been integrated into the way of life of the Chippewa-Cree on the Rocky Boys Reservation.

Wyoming Indian High School

The Wind River Shoshone-Arapaho Reservation situated in the rolling foothills of the Rockies has a population of approximately 7,000 people, 5,500 of whom are Indians. Most of the people who do not work for the tribe, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or the Indian Health Service, work in mills, uranium mines, the iron ore mines of U.S. Steel, or as custodians and cooks in the various federal installations serving the reservation and nearby communities. As in the case with many western communities in the nearby towns of Riverton and Ender (where the high schools serving Wind River youths are located), there is a high degree of discrimination against Indians. The educational problems which had become so critical during the last decade for Wind River children were similar to those of Ramah and Rocky Boys — very low achievement levels and a high degree of dropouts and disciplinary problems. While public elementary schools located on the reservation educated the primary youngsters, the adolescents were shipped to unfriendly high schools or to BIA boarding schools to handle "discipline" problems.

The Indian parents of the reservation knew something had to be done to change this situation. In 1968, they thought they had found an answer to the problem. At that time the State of Wyoming Department of Education began to reorganize its state public school districts. A parent group led by Al Sage, Al Redman, Alberta Friday, Tom Shakespeare and Mr. and Mrs. Darwin Sinclair submitted plans to the local county to form an independent public school district defined by reservation boundaries. The state used an administrative loophole to reject the plans of the Wind River community.

Disappointed but not discouraged, the parent group formed an organization known as the Wyoming Indian Education Association. The parents had wanted to form an independent public school district because the problems of financing would be less. Since this seemed impossible for the moment, they began to investigate other methods of gaining local control. They approached the Office of Education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. After almost two years of struggle and many

trips to Washington, the Wyoming Indian High School opened in January of 1972. While the Indian parents and the education association know that much of the achievement is due to their efforts, they all agree that final success would not have been realized without congressional help, especially that of Dick McCall, chairman of the Committee of Congressional Aides and staff person to Senator Gail McGee of Wyoming.

The final arrangements that led to local control were made through a contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The BIA, as with Ramah School, was hesitant to relinquish its responsibility for education on the Wind River Reservation to the Indian parents. Congressional pressure had forced its hand.

The new Indian school board felt that it was important to develop a curriculum that would offer their youngsters the same material as they would find in any non-Indian system. However, they also wanted the curriculum to include culturally relevant materials and texts, and special courses of interest to Indian students. An Indian Studies course and Reservation Civics class have been incorporated into the curriculum. Although not required, these courses have been popular among the students. In addition, the parents felt that closer teacher-student relationships were important to help students build positive self-images of themselves. Much of this closer contact has been established through the use of parents as teacher aides, smaller classes, and individualized academic and psychological counseling.

The major problem since the opening of the high school has been the lack of funds. The Bureau of Indian Affairs never provided enough money to meet the educational goals of the community. The land on which the school is located is a 50-acre parcel donated to the community by the Episcopal Church. The buildings which house the school are leased from the Episcopal Church. They are old, run down, and in constant need of costly repairs. While the costs of operating the school have increased, funds contracted by the BIA have remained the same. Some parents are planning to reopen negotiations with the State of Wyoming to form an independent public school system, in order to sufficiently meet the financial and educational responsibilities of running the school.

Wyoming Indian High School enrollment has risen from 36 students when the school began to 118 registered pupils. The parents within the community are pleased with the results so far, especially with the renewed interest of their children in receiving an education. As with Ramah Navajo High School and Rocky Boys Public School District, the future offers numerous challenges and opportunities to the parents and students of the Wind River Reservation that they are certain to meet and seize.

The Future of Indian Controlled Schools

In October of 1971, seven representatives of four Indian schools met in Boulder, Colorado to discuss the creation of a coalition of Indian

schools concerned with educational reforms. In December of that same year, the group was instrumental in organizing the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards (CICSB). Three years later CICSB served 87 Indian schools and organizations in 26 states. Those members of CICSB who do not control and manage their own educational system are interested in undertaking such responsibilities in the future. The CICSB provides legal, technical, and community development services to Indian groups which request assistance in establishing their own school boards, committees and organizations. All the Indian individuals mentioned earlier in this chapter are in some way connected with CICSB as members of the board of directors, the staff, or part of a continuing effort at the community level.

In an article in the April 1973 issue of the EDUCATION JOURNAL of the Institute for the Development of Indian Law, the executive director of CICSB responded to questions about community school efforts. In answering questions about the make-up of the member schools in the coalition, Gerald Clifford said:

> *We have member schools that are public school districts and others that are tribal education committees. We also have school boards that receive their authority or charter from their own tribes. We have Indian community schools which have state charters as well as JOM committees and other advisory boards. The principle of unity which keeps all of these varied types of Indian controlled educational institutions working together is that they all believe that Indians can best run their own schools; they believe that they should run their own schools; and they believe that they will run their own schools. We are in business to make this happen.*

When we asked about the assets which would make the community efforts to achieve control a success, he replied:

> *The greatest asset we have as an organization is a membership that is living proof that Indians can run their own schools, and run them better than anything that has been tried before by the non-Indians.*

The change to the Indian community control is the fastest growing Indian educational movement. As suggested in the statements above by Gerald Clifford, control is not limited to the complete takeover of an educational system. It also includes impacting school boards and educational committees, and learning to negotiate with state and federal educational agencies. For years, the Indian parents had been inactive and perhaps thought to be indifferent to the education of their children because of outright discrimination and lack of respect for a true cultural partnership. The educational achievement under the traditional systems of education, however, has sadly proved that without the involvement of the Indian parent, education of Indian children cannot succeed.

For Indians to gain control of their schools they, just as non-Indian groups, must have an impact on their immediate surrounding community. But the Indian struggle must surpass the efforts of other

people, for their efforts have only been successful when taken to the Congress. The Constitution of the United States has accorded responsibility for the conduct of Indian affairs to the Congress. After nearly 200 years, the people of the "domestic dependent nations," the "dependent sovereignities" known as Indian tribes, find this still to be the case.

Birgil Kill Straight, president of the CICSB, feels that in the future the struggle to achieve community control will be made easier only if the two primary agencies responsible for Indian education (BIA and the USOE) develop a policy to support community efforts for Indians and thereby do away with the bureaucratic and administrative obstacles caused by their refusal to do so. Once having established a policy, Mr. Kill Straight feels that a true measure of their commitment to a policy will be measured by the amount of financial support that is given to emerging community educational systems.

The administration of Indian schools is best left to members of the local community. This was true in the past, as is seen in the example of the Cherokee; it is true in the present as seen at Ramah, Rocky Boys and Wind River; and it will be true in the future. For an educational system to be successful, the parents of a community must "highly esteem the kind of learning taught" in those schools in their community. This can only be achieved by community control.

CHAPTER 9
The Milwaukee Federation of Independent Community Schools

J. Madeleine Nash*

Not long ago north Milwaukee was a smug, prosperous community stocked with the descendants of good German burghers, robust Lutherans and Roman Catholics who painted their names large on store front signs and built rows of pleasant, shingled houses for their ever increasing families. Now, although traces of the last Muellers and Meyers still linger, the neighborhood has changed into a poverty-stricken Black ghetto, and at night young men in Borsalino hats and high-heeled boots swagger in and out of the bars on Third Street.

Remarkably enough, it is here, in decaying north Milwaukee, that one of the country's most exciting and promising experiments in alternative education was launched in 1969: the Milwaukee Federation of Independent Community Schools. Even more remarkably, five years later, the Federation and most of its member schools were still going, a tribute perhaps to sheer human cussedness and powerful determination. A Chicago Sun-Times reporter put it very well. "In Milwaukee's inner city," he wrote, "six financially-troubled Roman Catholic schools have been transformed into six financially-troubled, nonsectarian,

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community-controlled schools with remarkable vitality."

Broken promises, financial difficulties, internal political squabbles — these are the liabilities of any community school, and as we shall see, the Milwaukee Federation has had its share. In addition, most of the parent-founders were poor, Black and often lacked a high school education. On paper, all this adds up to a losing combination. But in reality? Well, that's another story, one which may yet have a happy ending.

It begins in the late 1960s when Milwaukee's Catholic Archdiocese began trying to divest itself of a growing problem: the inner city parochial schools. Well-to-do White parishes might be prompted occasionally to make a donation to some far-away African or South American mission, but support a struggling parochial school five miles away? That was out of the question. Besides, as the White population moved out of the inner city, enrollment in the Catholic city school system dropped: the parishes likewise experienced a sag in membership, a dip in the Sunday collection. Financially, it became clear that the schools would only sink deeper and deeper into the red.

If the times had been different, the Church might well have considered withdrawing completely, following the frantic retreat of its White parishioners. But with social concern among the clergy at an all-time high, with the 1967 northside riots burned into recent memory, it found it had to deal with the question: how can the Church close its schools in the Black areas and keep them open, even build new ones, in White areas? To solve the dilemma, councils were created, democratically staffed with priests, nuns, and parents from the fourteen schools concerned. Interestingly enough, in the beginning parent participation was minimal. Then, suddenly, it caught fire.

What roused the parents to action? Unfortunately, no good records exist of these early deliberations. There are no first-person diaries, only bare, poignant minutes of the many long drawn-out meetings. "The Archbishop gave a pretty sad picture of the financial situation confronting the Archdiocese," reads one early account. "But in the same vein, we were told not to despair, but to have extreme optimism as far as the future is concerned." Gradually, the choice became clear. Either the schools would have to be closed, or the parents would have to shoulder the burden of maintaining them.

Who cares about some lousy little parochial schools anyway? The question echoes across years of my life; I hated the Catholic school I attended when I was 6, 7 and 8, the dust which blew off the playground at recess smelling of venial sin and chocolate cupcakes with vanilla icing. But the parents in Milwaukee were concerned with the more basic problem of having to send their children to the increasingly brutal and non-responsive public institutions which today, in the inner city at least, manage to pass for schools.

Rosemary Holley, a handsome woman who now heads the Martin

Luther King Inner City Development Project, was the parent who signed the legal document incorporating the Federation in 1969. "One thing was for sure!" she exclaims without hesitation. "I knew that *mine* wasn't going to go to a public school. I have thirteen children and in earlier years they all went to public schools. The first boy didn't go to a Catholic high school, he went to a public high school and he dropped out. All of them that stayed in Catholic schools graduated. I can't help thinking there's a connection. I, myself, went to Catholic and public schools both. I didn't think the Catholic schools were any better, but by the time I had children the Catholic schools had improved. They were much better than the public schools. I suppose I just felt that some basic things are important. Reading, writing and arithmetic, of course, but also some human things, like respect and stuff."

An important catalyst, Holley and the others agreed, was the late Bishop Marie Reed, who spoke fervently to the assembled Milwaukee parents about how she had helped to start the Morgan Community School in Washington, D.C. "Break away!" she exhorted her audience. "Do it!" And shortly thereafter, three of the schools did. St. Boniface was first. After Reed had spoken, the meeting broke and the parents from each school caucused. Then, when they reassembled, the spokesman from St. Boniface rose: "We've voted to break away and become a community school!" Two other schools — St. Francis and Holy-Trinity-Our Lady of Guadaloupe — followed, and thus it was that the Federation was born.

The beginnings were euphoric. In the words of one of the participants, "Everybody was happy. Everybody was excited. We'd meet and talk and meet and talk. It was amazing the involvement, the constant drive in you. I really had to slow down; my doctor told me to." Soon, however, reality began intruding, and the struggle to survive began.

Getting Started

How were the schools which had broken away to treat the others which had not? One of the university advisers made a recommendation which the parents finally accepted: the federal Title I money, which had been instrumental in funding the old parochial schools would henceforth go only toward planning the future of the schools which had broken away from the Church.

This was a fair decision, but one which caused much bitter fighting between the community schools and the others, marking the beginnings of a split between religious and non-religious secular interests which would remain a source of trouble. When four other schools — Martin Luther King, Michael, Leo and Harambee — joined the Federation in 1970, the division solidified. There were still eight other schools which had participated in the hearings but declined federation. Reluctantly, the Church continued to lend them support, while withdrawing aid from the community schools. At the time,

observers point out, most of these non-community schools were on the outer fringes of the inner city, in areas still White enough to impart a sense of security. Today, however, these same schools are in deep trouble; it has become obvious that the Archdiocese cannot carry their deficits forever. Will they try to join the Federation and demand their share of the increasingly meager common funds? Not surprisingly, community school parents balk at the idea.

To many, the difficulties which soon arose with the Church came as a surprise, for in the beginning the Milwaukee Federation seemed to enjoy an enviable position. After all, one of the greatest problems encountered by the community schools in the past had been that of finding school buildings which met local health and safety standards. Here the Milwaukee parents had guarantees of $1 a year leases for pre-existing school buildings which already had municipal approval. Or rather, they thought they had. In actuality, one school soon found itself charged a monthly rent of $600 by its parish, and eventually three schools were forced to move by unsympathetic pastors. As one parent explained, "The Archbishop was a blinding factor. We met with him and he told us, 'If you can go into something new and make a go of it, I'll be behind you 100%.' We didn't question; we believed."

Five years later, however, few of the parent-founders accuse the Archbishop of bad faith. More blame the parish system for the problems some of the schools faced. In order to compete for support from business and government, the schools had to relinquish their religious character. Not surprisingly, once they were no longer Catholic, they found themselves in the awkward position of being the unwanted stepchildren of the Church. In some cases, parish priests committed to the idea of a religious education actively worked to undermine community efforts. More often, it was a matter of the parishes themselves being desperately poor and strapped for cash. If things had worked out according to plan, this would have made little difference. Unfortunately, the necessary ingredient — business and government support — never materialized.

The Federation was founded in order to give the schools a central fund-raising body, and in concept, the idea was bold and ingenious. "Fiscally," explains one of the early advisers, "a federation is a much stronger entity, particularly when you're asking for handouts." Potential donors are likely to be turned off when approached two, three, four, five and six times. Rather than have each parent board approach foundations, businessmen, and government agencies separately, the schools would instead be able to petition for support as a group. Each year the amount of money the Federation has been able to attract has dwindled rather than increased. "The problem," says Jules Modlinski, a disillusioned community organizer, "was that no one wanted to give money for operations. I don't care what anyone says, the reality is that there's simply no money available for alternative schools."

In their initial naivete, the parents had expected that support

from the Archdiocese would be phased out more gradually than it was, giving them time to cast about for other sources of support. But even the first year the Church balked. "Only three weeks before the scheduled school openings for September 1969," wrote the two Marquette University consultants in their report to Title I, "the Milwaukee Archdiocese announced a drastic cut in allotted funds for each of the inner city schools for the 1969-70 school year. The reduced allocations proved to be from 30 to 60 percent below the budgets submitted by the . . . schools despite the fact that these minimum budgets were all below an equivalent per pupil expenditure of $400 per year."

Angry and desperate, a group of parents met with the Archbishop and as a result, the Church agreed to meet or increase the budget requests of the inner city schools. The next year, although the Church reduced its aid, the schools were able to find additional funds from "We Milwaukeans," a group of prominent local businessmen. But then the bumper years ended. The support from the Archdiocese fell to a meager $5000 a year and "We Milwaukeans," having done its good deed, did not not renew its commitment. From this time on, the burden of fund-raising has fallen more and more to the individual schools, to the Chicano and Black communities, with the Federation dutifully parcelling out occasional grants from local foundations, all the while looking desperately for some large, steady source of income.

"Being a community school is living from month to month," sighs Irene Watley, a parent who is now the administrator of Francis Community School. "And each year it gets tougher. The community schools were a novelty to begin with, a new venture. We were able to get support from a variety of sources. Title I helped with the planning, OEO funded the Federation office. We also got help from the universities, resource people, student teachers. But the outside help gets less and less and less when you're old." Now, Mrs. Watley explains softly, the community schools even have trouble getting student teachers. "The administrators say the community schools are too different from the public schools. It's not the right preparation for their students."

Still, in spite of the odds against it, a number of schools — if not the Federation itself — have managed to survive. Only three years ago the situation seemed much rosier. In fact, insisted then President Cecil Brown, himself a parent, "all things considered the Federation is in pretty good shape. We need money, of course, but we always need money." Brown's own relationship with the Federation dated back to 1972 when his oldest daughter reached school age and he realized he couldn't send her to the same public school he had attended as a boy. "I took one look at the reading scores and that was it!" he explains. So he enrolled her in the Harambee Community School where he was elected to the parent board and from there awarded the honor of heading up the Federation.

It was a voluntary post. Brown received no salary for his labors. "All you do is get ulcers," he said. "But you do what you have to do."

At the time Brown was visibly proud of the fact that he had trimmed Federation office expenses and paid off many of the creditors left behind by his predecessor. "We were in an office paying $200 a month rent," he explained. "Here we're supposed to be paying $100 a month, and if we don't have it we can slide a bit." Here was a tiny back cottage, behind some ramshackle frame houses on North 11th Street. Pausing at the front gate, one would hardly suspect that Brown, a longtime activist in Milwaukee's Black community, had great plans for the Federation's future.

"In the past the Federation has had tremendous problems fundraising," Brown acknowledged. "We've never gotten any state money, for instance, but we're trying to get some now. There's a bill before the Wisconsin legislature that would allow payment of funds to parents below a certain income level who send their kids to non-public schools, a modified voucher system. The problem is that it takes time to get people to realize that individual efforts aren't going to do the job. The ultimate goal would be to make the schools self-supporting. That's why I'm suggesting that the Federation form its own credit union and perhaps go into some education-related economic ventures, like book-publishing. The credit union alone would give us partial financial stability. Now tuition money comes in spurts, whenever people can put it together. A credit union would even out the cash flow so we don't have to spend so much time soothing creditors."

However, it became increasingly apparent that many parents with children in the school were suspicious of Brown and his plans for strengthening the Federation. "Dreams!" scoffed one critic. As outside support dried up, the individual schools understandably became resentful of any money spent on maintaining the central Federation office, and since the Federation was unable to come up with some unexpected windfall, such feelings could only grow. Brown was soon deposed as Federation president. Today the Federation exists in name only.

Divisions like this are probably inevitable but nonetheless unfortunate. As one battle-wise parent put it, "If you're not together, someone will deal with you." Certainly, at this point in time, one thing is clear: the success or failure of a community school seems to depend less on generous financial support than on the personal dedication of the indiviuals involved. In Milwaukee, at least, those schools which are thriving appear to enjoy a fortunate combination of progressive nuns, understanding parents and teachers, sympathetic parish priests — above all, people who are able to put aside their own power drives to the greater good, in this case, the education of 1000 children.

The lesson is illuminated in better perspective by the histories of two Federation schools which failed. Sadly enough, one of them was none other than Boniface, the school which so boldly had led the way.

St. Boniface

Elizabeth Campbell, a long-standing member of St. Boniface

parish, tells the tale.

St. Boniface, she explains, was Father Groppi's old parish, and as such quickly became a center for Milwaukee's 1960's civil rights movement. For the parishioners, it was an exciting time, a time for social outrage and intellectual ferment. Many highly educated people from all over the city and all over the country came to St. Boniface to seek out Father Groppi, Mrs. Campbell remembers with a smile. "This was one reason we thought we could succeed with the school. So many people were interested, so many people with good educational backgrounds."

Certainly the beginnings were promising. Parents and nuns were together. There were promises of help and money from all over. But as time went on, and the outside help faltered, divisions became more and more apparent. The nun in charge, whom many parents respected, was replaced by a male administrator from the YMCA, a move which marked the beginning of trouble. At this time, the board felt it important "since Boniface Community School's student population is 100% Black . . . that the leadership of the school be assumed by a Black administrator." Also, the board was concerned that continued religious leadership would hurt its search for outside funding. Few had the wisdom, sighs Elizabeth Campbell, to realize that the community schools weren't going to get any state and local money anyway.

At any rate, the lay administrator chosen by the board stayed only a year, and in the meantime the nun who had run the school earlier also left. A lack of firm leadership soon developed, and disagreements began to surface. The ex-principal, Sister Kathleen, had been an advocate of an open-classroom approach; when she left, however, the other nuns started to return to the old structured routine. The parent board split. Some felt they had to support the nuns — they were Catholics after all. Others disagreed. With no one in control, the situation was quickly aggravated by overspending and shortly before Easter 1972 a group of nuns and teachers walked out because they were not receiving their salaries. Elizabeth Campbell remembers the event well:

"The teachers gave us notice they weren't coming back after Easter holiday. They came into school, but not into their classrooms. They held a session behind closed doors, and they got some parents to sign a loan for money for their salaries. They also got these parents to sign a statement giving them the power to run the schools. Then after they got that power, the teachers locked up the schools. When they got the money, they said, then they would come back."

The atmosphere turned poisonous. A group of parents, including Mrs. Campbell, reopened the school. The nuns started their own school in defiance. A teacher from one of the other community schools tried to help the parents out. "The children were desperate," she recalls. "They asked me, 'Could we have some lessons? Could we just look at a book?'" Looking back at the chain of events, the present administrator

of another school thinks the parents were as much to blame as the teachers. "That school was militant administration-wise, board-wise, discipline-wise. For instance, there was one idea that the students should be brought before the board for discipline. But the board met only once a month. Students aren't dumb. They know they have to be good just before the board meeting. And afterwards? They can be as bad as they want. After all, who's going to be mad at you a month later?"

Not surprisingly, Boniface crumbled. In its place the parish pointedly started a parochial school, St. Martin de Porres, but at the end of 1974 it too closed. The eviction of Boniface still haunts the memory of Elizabeth Campbell, "When the priest gave us the notice, I was so distressed, and I used a few choice words, words maybe I shouldn't have used. Someone said, 'but he's a priest,' and I said, 'yes, but first he's a man like everybody else.' We were working on such exciting things — the open classroom and non-graded system — and for awhile, when we still had money, we just went everywhere on field trips. Once we even went to South Dakota. Oh, it was such a beautiful idea! But all those hopes, all that work, all those dreams."

Michael

Boniface is often referred to as the blackest of the community schools. Interestingly enough, Michael, the other school which failed, was the most racially diverse. Its student body of 335 broke almost evenly between White and Black, and included a large Chicano and Indian population besides. As one nun smiled sadly, "They had such a mixture at Michael. I remember once watching a Black teacher leading a group of Mexican children in a Mexican dance. They had Indians, they had Mexicans, they had just everybody. As far as I'm concerned, they really messed up a good thing."

The old Michael died in 1973, a victim of an internal power squabble which pitted White against Black, parent against teacher. The nuns who had run Michael to begin with left after the first year, and the school had to rely on inexperienced volunteers from the universities to run the school. But this was only part of the problem. Mainly, the school floundered because of a basic conflict of irreconcilable educational philosophies. Many of the White parents wanted to experiment with giving their children greater educational freedom; many of the Black parents wanted their children to have nothing more, nothing less than rigorous instruction in the three R's. It seems to have been the classic trap described by Jonathan Kozol in his book, *Free Schools:* Whites seeking liberation from a structured, disciplined middle-class lifestyle clashing with Blacks seeking liberation from poverty, ignorance and rats that bite.

Sue Roman, one of the Black parents, served as a teacher's aide at Michael for three years. She and her husband, a worker in the meat-packing industry, started a new all Black Michael — in the basement of St. George's Episcopal Church.

"The basic problem," as Mrs. Roman sees it, "was with these real good White people who felt they owe Black people something. Our teachers were from rich White families; their fathers were doctors and lawyers and they lived way up north. But they were dressing like a bunch of clowns. 'Don't take our Black kids and teach them to dress that way,' I told them. And another thing. Their classrooms were so dirty, so filthy. They said it was to create a home atmosphere. But to me it was like they were saying, 'This is the way Black people live; this is the way Black people feel comfortable.' I'll tell you what going to Michael did to my son. When he started going to public school he dropped out. At Michael he didn't have to hand in assignments if he didn't want to. My feeling is, we do not have a community junior high or a community high school, so let us prepare our children to go to the public schools. I'm against society too, but we have to live in society. So let us expose our kids to what's out there."

"The Whites on the board," continues Mrs. Roman, "the chairman, the co-chairman, the secretary, the treasurer, handled all the money. The Black parents were used only to make a show. We had a social worker on our board, we had an attorney, we had all these educated people but some of the nuns they dismissed I thought should have stayed. According to these White liberals, these nuns were 'racist.' Well, maybe they were, but my feeling is, 'if you're going to do your job, o.k. be prejudiced.' Children who had these nuns for a teacher, I feel gained. One of these same White liberals became upset with the teachers she helped keep on and so she resigned from the board and started her own school. She was a big one for openness, and letting the child decide. But any kid if you ask him what he wants to do will tell you he'd rather play basketball."

When Sue Roman and some other parents wanted to make a class in Black culture mandatory for the Black children, the White parents and teachers fought it. Some of the Black parents, too. "This one Black woman said she didn't want any Black teachers teaching her child." Mrs. Roman remembers. "She thought they didn't know anything anyhow!" The situation continued to deteriorate; until finally there were hate messages on the school blackboards. 'I am a nigger hater,' read one. At last the White parents resigned from the board en masse and shortly after the parish invited Michael to leave and included with the eviction notice, a bill for back rent amounting to $13,000.

Urban Day, a non-federated community school, has taken over part of the space once occupied by Michael, and with a little help from the Episcopalians, the new Michael is starting out modestly as a nursery and primary school with 25 children and 20 parents. Not surprisingly, it is still shaky financially, but then financial instability is simply a fact of life for the Milwaukee Federation schools.

What is startling, what must remain incredible, is that these schools have continued to survive. Somehow, the parents find ways of supporting them. Why do they bother? The reason soon emerges: despite their many problems, all of these schools are educational suc-

cesses. Even Harambee, despite a history of internal political turmoil,* is clearly doing something the public schools aren't. As Cecil Brown put it, "The children who finish first grade at Harambee can read and write and add and subtract." One below-average student who transferred from Harambee to a public school actually found herself in an honors class doing A and B work.

Looking back, it is interesting that some of the founders considered the community schools which kept nuns on in teaching and administrative posts as betrayers of community control. "Parochial schools in community clothing," they grumbled. However, in fact, these are the very schools which today are the strongest: Bruce Guadaloupe, Martin Luther, and Leo. (Francis, a school without nuns, also held its own for a while, but as we shall see, it was a special case.)

Martin Luther King

The Martin Luther King Community School still shares a prim, red-brick church building with its old home parish of St. Gall's. The school's administrator, a Black nun with a melodious voice, is wearing her winter uniform: a plaid skirt and heavy sweater. "At least where nuns stay on," she chuckles, "you can save some money. You also have a certain stability." At Martin Luther King, for instance, four nuns are still working. "We didn't have any salary for two years," one recalls. "I can remember we had $20 at one point and that was all." Unlike their counterparts at Boniface, the Martin Luther King nuns didn't stage a walk-out to protest non-payment of their salaries. Rather, they allied themselves so thoroughly with the community that when a new parish priest from St. Gall's tried to undermine the Federation, joining with two other prelates in an attempt to create a new parochial school, they stopped going to mass at St. Gall's. As a result, Martin Luther King is now, in the estimate of many, the strongest member of the Federation.

Martin Luther King clearly has a lot of things going for it, not the least of which is its full-time fund raiser, Sister Judy, a youthful nun with merry eyes and a disarming smile. "I come from a family of salesmen," she giggles. "All my brothers are in sales, and my father even wanted me to go into business with him. I suppose I became a nun because I thought there was more to life than making money — little did I dream that was exactly what I'd be doing. I've been told that if I could sell the Empire State Building, I would."

With 180 students, the annual budget at Martin Luther King

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*Unfortunately, Harambee (which in Swahili means "pull together") was the one community school I was unable to visit. According to one source, the school was considering seceding from the federation altogether and the administrator and parent board were split about allowing a reporter in. Perhaps this was because the financial situation was even more desperate than usual: there were reports in a local newspaper that unless the community contributed to the school fund drive ever more generously than it had in the past, Harambee would have to close. Now, however, Harambee seems to have pulled itself together. Significantly, like the other successful schools, Harambee now has a nun at the helm.

hovers at around $70,000, less than half of which is met by the $190 a year tuition. The rest must be raised by hook or by crook, and here Sister Judy swings into action. "Would you like to buy a ticket to the prize drawing at our Everybody's Birthday party?" she inquires hopefully. (For 25 cents, who could resist?) On the windowsill in Sister Reginalda's office a strange assortment of items awaits a purchaser. "Do you want a Happy Day Magnet?" Sister Judy continues. "Or maybe a room sachet? A turkey lifter? Some plastic measuring spoons? Or how about a carry-all ashtray?" Just in case, Sister Judy and Sister Reginalda have been saving . . . Dial coupons, Pepsi Cola bottle caps, Campbell soup labels, aluminum cans of every variety and newspapers, newspapers, newpapers. But all this is gravy. The basic fact of life at Martin Luther King Community School is this: every month each family must sell $25 worth of oranges, Christmas cards, and tickets to dances to make up the grand sum of $1500.

Graduates of high-tuition private schools who routinely throw their own alma mater's pleas for money in the trash basket might well be humbled by the overwhelming response generated by the fund drives of the community schools. At Martin Luther King, the monthly fund drive routinely goes over the minimum set by Sister Judy. And this is from parents who rarely make more than $6,000 a year. "In a community school," explains founding parent Rosemary Holley wearily, "You have fund raising not for new buildings and libraries but just to keep the school operating one more week, one more day. Boy, before one month is over you've got to do it again. But when you know the budget and you know your teachers aren't getting what they should, it makes you more conscious. My friends don't seem to mind. They say, 'Yep, Martin Luther King. You gotta help that school keep on going.' But then I'm in a lucky position. In the job I have I can sell anything. What about parents on welfare and stuff? Their friends don't have any more money than they have. Let me tell you, you have to feel your child is really getting something."

Leo Community School

It is precisely this conviction which drives parents to continue their effort month after month after month. At Leo Community School, Paulette Simmons has enrolled all four of her children. Separated from her husband, she can't quite scrape together the tuition this semester. When I met her, she was still $6.00 short. The tuition is obviously a burden, "But," she explains excitedly, one word tripping over the next, "I think its better to spend money on them now than wait until later on when they want to learn and find out they can't. My children went to kindergarten in the public schools. My son went into the first grade in a public school. He stayed in the principal's office most of the time because the teacher said he was a behavior problem. And he was only two feet tall. Finally he refused to go to school. The teacher tried scolding him in the classroom but that made it worse. He stayed in the principal's office and he was four times

suspended and he was only six years old! In the first grade he couldn't even write his name. He didn't like the building, he didn't like the teacher, he would make any excuse not to have to go to school."

Now Hubert Simmons is happily enrolled at Leo. He's in third grade, reading at third grade level. As it turns out, Hubert's main problem was his eyesight. In public school the teacher made him stay near the front of the room so she could watch him more closely; "But," exclaims Hubert's mother with obvious indignation, "He was far-sighted!"

Visiting the community schools, it's not difficult to see how they manage to turn the kids on. It's Martin Luther King's birthday and Leo is giving a special presentation. Parents are there, kids are there, the teachers are there and a lot of people are wearing LEO T-shirts, including a busty guitar strumming nun who turns out to be Sister Marie Christine, the principal. "You can be a peaceful boy," chirps a tiny six-year old, deftly reading from a crib sheet. "You can be a peaceful man. You can be like Martin, yes you can."

With few exceptions, Leo's parents participate in an In-Kind service program to help cover the school's comparatively high tuition of $300 a year. Thus, most parents actually put in only $100 per child, making up the rest by helping out at the school one or two hours a week. Many become so involved they end up working more. Paulette Simmons' mother, for instance, comes to school every day to assist in the cafeteria. Every Saturday five or six parents clean and sweep the classrooms. Mrs. Loretta Turnage, another parent, is a teacher's aide. Part of her salary is paid by the school; the rest is picked up by a federal careers program. Mrs. Turnage and other dedicated parents like her are the reason the community schools have been able not only to survive, but also to provide their students with a superior education. With 100 students, Leo has six full-time teachers (two are nuns) plus six teacher aides. An adult/child ratio of one to eight is hard to beat anywhere and certainly not by the Milwaukee public schools.

At Leo, the changeover in leadership has been gradual; in fact, Leo is probably the prime example of a school where the nuns led the community instead of vice versa. At first, for instance, Sister Marie Christine continued to do everything: opening the school when there was a board meeting . . . setting up the agenda for the meeting . . . reminding slow-paying parents that they owed tuition. Now, however, the parents have taken over these functions and while some secularists are still disturbed by the religious character of Leo's origins, there is no doubt that the school has become a bona fide example of community involvement.

The new Leo is smaller than the old, mainly because most of the Whites – who five years ago made up 30 percent of the student body – have fled. Fifteen years ago, after all, the school went all the way up to ninth grade and enjoyed an enrollment which approached 1000. Nevertheless, the parents proudly point out, not much else has changed. Says Loretta Turnage bluntly, "We were happy with the parochial

schools, but the archdiocese gave us the choice of: 1) closing our doors, 2) selling out to the public schools or 3) going community. We had to make a decision. Some people at first didn't like the idea of community-run schools but the only difference I can see is that we don't teach religion any more during school hours."

Parent Involvement

Educationally, all of the schools are healthily "progressive," a direction they had taken even while under the Church's protection. Still they are far from being "free" schools, and upper middle class parents who think of community schools as being synonymous with avant-garde education would probably find the Milwaukee schools disappointingly tame. The point is, these parents were satisfied with their schools as they were. Convinced that the parochial schools were already better than the public schools, they addressed themselves to a more basic question: how to keep their schools alive. And if Boniface and Michael succumbed to the frantic stirrings of too many cooks, the other school boards have shown quiet good sense, delegating complete authority in day-to-day educational matters to administrators and teachers who have won their trust.

Sister Reginalda recalls the situation at Martin Luther King while it was still St. Gall's: "At the time we were changing over from church-directed to parent-directed, our parents asked us: are you sisters going to stay and teach when we become a community school? We wrote our Mother Superior because at the time the Catholic schools were losing teachers and we didn't know what the answer would be." The Mother Superior's answer was affirmative, and the parents were visibly relieved. They gave Sister Reginalda a clear mission. "You have been educated to educate and you will educate," they told her. "Don't talk to us about things like curriculum. We don't know what the word means. You just do what you're supposed to do the way you're supposed to do it."

At Martin Luther King, laughs Sister Reginalda, "parents and teachers have no trouble swinging together." Sometimes, in fact, it seems that home and school have merged. Nowhere is this more evident than at the parent-teacher conferences which take the place of report cards at all the comnunity schools. Sometimes these are held at the school, sometimes in the home, and often the child contributes his or her own self-evaluation. "I bin wrolt," one first grader wrote, meaning working, of course. "I bin good." Another tried to con his teacher. "I like to do schoolwork," he scribbled. "That's funny," his mother told the teacher. "He certainly doesn't like to do his schoolwork at home."

Any public school administrator who thinks that poor parents don't care about their child's education would be astounded by the number of parents who turn up to talk to teachers at the community schools. Many are on welfare, others are beauticians and barbers and nurses aides, and at the upper end of the economic scale one finds a truck driver, an insurance salesman, a legal secretary. At Martin

Luther King a father has showed up to talk with teacher Kathy Bollow about his son. John, it seemed, was developing into a behavior problem. The father is tall, slender, worried; dressed in a red-plaid shirt he awkwardly tries to fold himself into a small child's chair. "You got our letter," the teacher smiles. "Yeah," he says. "John has been very good since then," she adds trying to balance the bad with the good. "Yeah, I tried to straighten him out." Now it's his turn to smile. He looks over his child's self-evaluation sheet. "John's an excellent reader," the teacher continues. "He comprehends well and asks such interesting questions. But on math he's a little behind." The conversation eventually veers back toward the child's behavior problem. "Call me," the father tells the teacher, "whenever there's a problem. I'll do whatever I can. I'll do whatever needs to be done."

Bruce Guadaloupe

To these parents, education is a serious matter. Hortensia Herrera knows that. But she also knows that her children are going to be better off than she is, and their children after them, and the children of her children's children. And the way it's going to happen, she says, is through education.

Hortensia Herrera lives in a small shingled house. She's a tiny woman with weathered brown skin and a lilting accent. Not far away, Bruce Guadaloupe, the community school she helped start, is still thriving. "I feel like a part of that school," she confesses. "Yes, you go crazy attending so many meetings. You get tired of working and working and working just to survive, and then to top it off you have the problem of the schools. We have to pay tuition, we have to pay taxes and, let's face it, a lot of people in the community are poor. Oh boy, I'm getting old; you do get tired, you know. But if I didn't have a little one at home, I'd be in that school. I wouldn't care anything about home. I would go to the school, I would do anything for that school. Oh, I'm a human being, all right. I complain. I say I don't care if the school closes down – but the next day I'm back again."

Mrs. Herrera carries an extra burden because she is bilingual unlike many of the parents who send their children to Bruce Guadaloupe. "From the beginning," she smiles, carefully folding her husband's shirts, "the parochial schools gave better help than the public schools. We had a wonderful staff at the time and we still do; people who are not interested only in making money, but in teaching our children. For us, we close every year and we don't have any money. Sometimes it's July and we haven't paid our teachers yet. That's the kind of teachers we have. They know there is no money. These people will sell tacos, they will come to the dances, they will do everything, because they believe in the school, too."

Why does Hortensia Herrera believe so fanatically in education? "I want my children to learn to survive in this world," she says. "I remember my first day in the Anglo school. I was terrified. I remember the teacher taking time out with me, telling me this was my

hand, my nose, my eyes. I didn't know the words." In her own home, Hortensia Herrera speaks only English; her children know only the Spanish they learn in school. "We want to get ahead, but we want to do it peacefully," she says. "I have two daughters in the factory. One in the kitchen is making $3.85 an hour, but she is going to school, too. Who knows, if she becomes a legal secretary maybe she'll make $5 an hour. That's what I've been slaving for all my life . . . actually my husband is the one who slaves. I'm the one who pushes."

Because of its predominantly Spanish-speaking population, Bruce Guadaloupe is reputed to be the most Catholic of the federated schools. Yet today it has only one nun on its staff. When I found her, Sister Mary Milo was stacking books in the school's new library, a huge room in the attic at least 20 feet tall. The ceiling is painted five shades of green because the school kept running out of paint. "Before we had five sisters here. One felt she couldn't work with the children very well, two left the convent and the others we didn't rehire. They weren't flexible enough. One of the main things we look for in teachers is flexibility and innovativeness. We ask them, "What would you do if a child told you to go to hell? How do you react if people wander unannounced into your classroom? Are you willing to sit down and work with small groups?' The last thing we ask is, 'Are you certified to teach?' " Nods Hortensia Herrera, "I don't want to know what someone is qualified to teach. I want to know what they will do for my child." Mrs. Herrera, who sits in on the teacher selection committee, adds another question to Sister Milo's list: "Are you willing to work for nothing?" The board, she says, has turned down some applicants with families for the simple reason that the $600 a month salary at Bruce Guadaloupe didn't meet their needs.

Like the other community schools, Bruce Guadaloupe somehow scrapes by on an annual budget which hovers around $60,000. At $50 a family, tuition is little help. And yet every year Bruce Guadaloupe's enrollment increases, the waiting list lengthens and the parents somehow come up with the money. The Chicano community is well aware that Bruce Guadaloupe has an excellent reputation educationally. Its pioneering bilingual program has cut the high school drop-out rate among graduates to almost zero. Out of 13 eighth-graders who took the high school entrance exam at Milwaukee Tech, Sister Milo says proudly, 13 passed. Milwaukee Tech demands a B average of its entrants.

In spite of their poverty, their never-ending scramble for money to keep their school alive, the parents at Bruce Guadaloupe remain intensely proud and jealous of their independence. Thus, at one meeting they voted *not* to accept federal money for their bilingual program because the guidelines were too rigid. As Sister Mary Milo explains it, accepting federal money would have consigned the school's bilingual program to a set place at a set time with set personnel. At Bruce Guadaloupe, every teacher is bilingual and every class works with both languages.

The sad fact of the matter is that funds exist for research, and they exist for narrowly-defined special interest programs, but there are no general-purpose funds for keeping struggling alternative schools alive. One solution to this dilemma was discovered by the parents of the Francis Community School, which gained new life when it started to specialize in teaching children with "problems."

Irene Watley, an administrator, is a warm and gracious woman who somehow continues speaking evenly and calmly while a screaming child in the next room is being quieted by her staff. "There is nothing to do," she explains softly, "except talk to him quietly and give him Kleenex to blow his nose. He's gotten much better recently. Before, this used to happen twice a day." Mrs. Watley's office is a former utility closet and cloakroom in a graying yellow brick building with the words "St. Elizabeth" carved in stone over the forbidding entranceway arch. Many windows are boarded over and glass shattered by last night's burglar shines on the doorsill. The classrooms, however, are warm and gay, decorated with bright paper cut-outs.

In one room six young boys are sprawled across their desks, rapping with their teacher. Because their attention span is short, the teacher always writes a schedule on the blackboard. Reading will last 15 minutes followed by 15 free minutes. A rhythmic routine is established, and the children respond. They find they are able to sit quietly and listen, if only it's not forever. Francis uses other simple behavior modification techniques, awarding children points for such things as getting to the room on time and sitting in their seats. 350 points merits a trip to the movies, 400 points an excursion to MacDonald's, 200 points bowling or ice skating. On the negative side, Mrs. Watley charges for swear words. "I want two cents for every swear word," she told one young man who just couldn't seem to break the habit.

With three full-time teachers, three teacher aids and a social worker, Francis is able to give a lot of individual attention and care to the 25 boys who now attend, and with a special education grant of $86,000 the school, more than any of the other Federation schools, approaches being self-supporting. But grants dry up from one day to the next, and so Francis, while better off, is also the most vulnerable. On this point, however, Irene Watley remains philosophical. Francis has hovered on the edge of disaster for so long that finally she's gotten used to it.

At one point, the school had 165 students, 95 percent Black and 5 percent White, a large number of whom had been labeled "behavior problems" by the public schools. Not surprisingly, the neighborhood was one of the worst in north Milwaukee, and concerned parents defined their mission to educationally rehabilitate "the many inner-city youth who were roaming the streets as a result of suspension or exclusion from public and private schools."

From the beginning, the educational program was innovative and

exciting. For awhile, some say it bordered on being undisciplined. There were no grades, but specialized centers — a math center, a reading center and a learning center complete with live animals for the children to care for. Unfortunately, the parish was struggling for its own survival, and when United Day Care Services approached the pastor with an offer from Model Cities to renovate the aging, decrepit building, Francis Community School lost out.

A group of determined parents managed to relocate the school in temporary quarters on the second floor of a bank building, but by this time the teaching nuns had already returned to the Mother House and many families were enrolling their children in other schools. Fragmented and faced with a shrinking student body, the remaining parents decided that their school should specialize in what it had been doing so well all along; teaching disturbed children. "It was partly a matter of the funding sources being discovered," explains Mrs. Watley, "but we also knew the need to work with this kind of child."

Conclusion

The moral of this fable about near death and resurrection should be self-evident: the Milwaukee Federation schools don't give up easily. Again and again one must return to the question of what motivates these people to work so hard, to risk heartbreak, just to keep these schools alive. Part of the answer may lie in the fact that many community school families have recently moved from the South. They have not accepted the cold distant life style of the big northern and midwestern cities and most of all, they remember their own school days when teachers and parents worked closely together. Elizabeth Campbell, for instance, grew up in Arkansas. "The schools I attended," she recalls, "were segregated, but they weren't bad. If we got a teacher who wasn't qualified, she was asked by the parents to leave. I remember, during the depresssion, there wasn't any money, so that school had to be cut to five months. Well, the parents didn't like that and so they got together and they finished out the teacher's salaries themselves just so we could go to school for the whole year. You know, if a school is small, and if you have a voice, then you're willing to work and sacrifice for it."

It is clear that all the parents regard the inner city public schools with a deep, abiding sense of horror. Irene Watley explains, "Most of your parents in community schools have had bad experiences with public schools. They've become more concerned as parents," she says. "Me, for instance. I'd always been the kind of parent who visited the school and talked to the teacher. This started in California where there was more open communication than in Milwaukee. I guess I was a what. . . a nosy parent? I was always visiting the schools here and talking to this one teacher. 'If there are any problems,' I told her, 'Please call me.' 'Oh' the teacher said, 'your child is doing fine.' Well I got the report card and my daughter had everything 'unsatisfactory.' If she's doing fine, why 'unsatisfactory?' If she's a teacher, I thought, why

doesn't she try to motivate the child? All of a sudden, my daughter was in the third grade and she still didn't read. But I was a parent. I didn't know what educating a child was all about."

Significantly, many of the community schools count the children of public school teachers among their students. One is the son of a principal, two others are the children of Geneva Harris, a former teacher's aide. "The children in public schools are learning nothing!" Mrs. Harris says. "Where I work now — Milwaukee Area Technical College — students who are graduating from public schools have to go to adult education classes in order to compete on community college level." Now that her older daughter is about to finish her last year at Martin Luther King, Geneva Harris has to worry about high school. The community schools, she explains, only go through eighth grade. Then the parents are faced with a hard choice: either they can send their children to expensive parochial high schools in White areas or they can hope they survive the public school system. Most parents, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, somehow scrape together the $600 a year tuition to send their children to the parochial high schools. The others make an annual pilgrimmage to the board of education to ask for transfers to high schools outside the inner city. "The children here aren't used to fighting," Geneva Harris frowns. "But in a public school, in order to exist, you have to learn to fight."

Not surprisingly, Cecil Brown's suggestion that the Federation begin thinking about founding a community high school has not fallen on deaf ears. But there are no funds for a high school, critics complain, and indeed there aren't. However, lack of funds hasn't deterred these parents yet. Sister Reginalda never ceases to marvel. "Our families aren't wealthy. They're not well-off. They're not even barely well-off. Over 70 percent of our children, for example, qualify for the federal free lunch program. Still those families will somehow come across with that tuition. Why? Because it's important to them and the children know it." Being sent to a community school, children soon realize, means that their parents think they are something pretty special, and they respond accordingly. They learn. It's a stacked deck, all right, but in favor of the children, not against them.

In the end, the continued success of the Milwaukee Federation schools must rest squarely on the parents, on their conviction that schools do make a difference, on their sense of total commitment. Surrounded by the hopelessness of the city, these people stubbornly persist in fighting for their children. Those who refuse to carry their share of the load are unceremoniously booted out. Clearly, a highly selective process is at work here; and it soon becomes obvious that these are very special people, just as elite in their way as the rich and cultured who support private education at the other end of the economic scale. Even without the special environment provided by the community schools, one can't help thinking that children with parents like this should still have a lot going for them. So tell me, why couldn't the public schools teach Irene Watley's daughter to read?

CHAPTER 10
Alternatives in Public Schools: The Minneapolis Experiment

Zeke Wigglesworth*

Freedom of choice is one of those concepts with as many interpretations as interpreters, and the struggle for clarity of the concept is seen nowhere more these days than in America's public schools.

Most every educator has a thought or two about what freedom of educational choice means. For some it is being able to suggest, without fear, that students read "Slaughterhouse Five," or that old favorite of the easily distraught, "Catcher in the Rye." For others it might mean simply being able to follow a personal life style different than that of the school board; or it might mean having enough money in the school kitty to adequately equip a science laboratory; or it might mean permission from the principal to try a new approach in the classroom.

On all sides there are expert voices trying to define and put into use educational freedom of choice. There are voices that say minority children cannot learn in segregated environments, and thus schools must be forced to take away one choice, the choice of a neighborhood

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school, to provide another choice, a minority child being close to White peers. There are other voices which say that educational choices made in the last decade, which were roundly praised and widely distributed, were not always right; that not only does Johnny have trouble reading, he can't keep a checkbook in order.

There are voices from administrators and boards of education which say that teachers are becoming too powerful, too political, that the educational choices of children are being limited by the picket line and the labor union bargaining table. And there are voices coming back from the teachers which say that many school boards and administrators are entrenched in the past and want nothing more in life than to see schools filled with neat ranks of children learning their ABC's by rote and never, never thinking evil thoughts which cut against the established grain of the community.

Somewhere in the middle of all this shouting are the parents, onlookers who often feel, sometimes with justification, that their kids are getting raw deals from the whole educational system. In some communities, the gap between parent and school has grown to a chasm. Bond issues fail time and again, and what were nagging doubts about school performance have become shouts for "accountability," whatever that is. In other communities, the gap between parent and school has tended to stay a gap, at least for the present. Such a community is Minneapolis, a cold prairie village on the banks of the Mississippi River that grew into a bouncy, usually manageable city of 430,000 in the heart of a metropolitan area of about two million.

It is not suggested that Minneapolis has no educational problems; it does. There are ill-concealed feelings of mistrust and sometimes open hatred for the school system, caused in large part by a federal court order to desegregate the city's schools by the 1975 school year, and there are deep-seated fears that "those people" down at the central school office are determined to destroy personal choice by taking away all the city's neighborhood schools.

But like any school system, there are people who do support education, who do support innovations and moral issues such as school integration and who make an effort to become involved in their schools.

Nowhere in Minneapolis is that involvement stronger than in the southeast section, a gentle, hilly mixture of Mississippi bluffs, University of Minnesota campus, industrial park, residential district and market place. A neighborhood sense of identity and mutual concern has grown in recent years because of an educational program called "Southeast Alternatives," (SEA) a five-year federally funded experiment to see if alternative education — with *choice* as the major element — can work.

The experiment was born under the wing of the Experimental Schools section of the United States Office of Education. In 1970, when it announced that money was available for pilot projects, the office said: "By supporting a limited number of large scale experiments of

comprehensive programs with a major focus on the documentation and evaluation of the projects, experimental schools will serve as a bridge from research, demonstration, and experimentation to actual school practice."

Minneapolis educators felt the Southeast area of the city offered excellent opportunities to attack urban education problems. The schools in the area were small, with "controllable" numbers of children enrolled, and they were relatively close together. And, in addition, the community is a sort of cross-section of urban life. As one SEA document put it: "The schools of the (SEA) area are attended by the wealthy and the poor; by minority students of various ethnic backgrounds; by students living in Southeast as well as students living outside the immediate neighborhood, and by students with highly educated parents as well as those whose parents have minimal formal education."

Given that such diversity is the normal way of things in urban American life, Minneapolis felt, as did the U.S. Office of Education, that it might be worth a try to see if problems met and hopefully mastered by alternative education styles in Minneapolis might have implications and applications elsewhere.

The balance between the rights of parents and the rights of educators in the education of children was one of the first tasks facing SEA planners, and it has yet to be fully determined. The problem gets down to the basic fears of many parents. What is education? Who decides what education is available? And when the choices are made, who is it, finally, who decides that the choices were the right ones?

It is a can of worms that has caused no little concern to James K. Kent, the 34-year-old administrator who came to the SEA experiment as a former Minneapolis high school principal. "What this experiment opens up, for Minneapolis as well as the rest of the country," Kent says, "is the classic political question: who makes what decisions at what level? When you have constituents as widespread and in such variety as students and faculty, parents, the central office, the federal government, taxpayers . . . well, it gets a bit difficult to decipher. I guess we have approached this by saying that all of these constituents, put together, form the SEA community."

Before trying to decide how to solve that "classic political question," SEA planners had to put forth some choices — without choices there is no problem of decision, as Kent puts it. The experiment uses five schools in its programs:

- The Tuttle "contemporary" school offers a self-contained, graded education.
- The Pratt and Motley elementary schools were paired and provide continuous-progress, non-graded programs for children 5-12.
- Marcy Open School allows children 5-12 and their parents more than the usual choice in educational programs.
- The Southeast Free School has the wide-open educational approach you'd expect from a free school and students ranging in age

from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary.

• Marshall-University High School gives junior high and high school students a number of alternatives ranging from a trimester plan of "individual-directed study," which allows parents and students a major role in the educational process, to a highly structured program of less control.

During the beginning stages of the project, parents in the Southeast area were invited to a number of school-sponsored meetings to learn about the types of schools that would be available during the five-year experiment. The major difference in the schools, as set up in the SEA project, is the amount of parent and community involvement. By setting up various levels of involvement, the key element in the project, "choice" would take on a strong meaning for parents. It was not easy to plan such an arrangement. "One of our basic problems all along," Kent says, "was how to define community, and from that, community involvement. You hear from a group in the community, and you ask yourself, 'Are they really representative?' To some people in Southeast, community involvement means that parents or the community determine the entire program for a school. To others it means better communication between parents and schools. Our experience has been that it's good to search people's minds; that this shows a wide variance about what people see as their rights and obligations. We have seen a wide range of involvement here in SEA, all the way from attending PTA meetings to more substantive things such as being a part of the selection process for a new principal."

As SEA planners saw it, they were facing two distinct power groups: on the one hand were professional educators, hired by boards of education which were in turn empowered under state law to run education in Minneapolis; on the other hand were local community groups, often parents, who felt, as one SEA document put it, "that professional educators and a distant city-wide board of education do not make the best decisions but that a local school's parents, students, faculty and staff do."

After pondering those points of view, Kent and his planning team (parents, students, teachers) arrived at what they felt was the only fair approach: a compromise. "What is important is that professional schoolmen and lay people recognize and act upon their interdependence and mutual obligations to one another. The best approach is to provide vehicles for continuous interaction between students, parents and staffs so they come to function as a conflict-solving group — a school community," an official position paper said. "Vehicles for continuous interaction" is a ponderous, educationalese way of saying "let's work together." SEA has tried that, and has made an effort through the history of the project to see if, in fact, the folks out there are working together. One method has been a series of surveys among SEA parents.

After one year of operation, the Bureau of Field Studies and Surveys of the University of Minnesota surveyed parents about a wide

range of items, including how they felt about their SEA schools. The survey, not surprisingly, showed that the original premise about the Southeast area had been correct – it was diverse.

For example, those surveyed were asked if they felt it would be a good idea to have a "parent with power," or a parent who could gripe – with some authority – to go to SEA or downtown administrators about the operation of the schools. The parents were split almost down the middle: 49.2 percent said it was a good thought, 46.7 percent thought it wasn't so good. In another section of the survey, parents were asked to rank what was the most important thing their children should learn. While the majority said "basic subjects," it was a horse race after that, with choices ranging all the way from fine art appreciation to being able to adapt to new situations.

Yet, even with diversity, there seemed to be general agreement in many areas. The majority of elementary parents (85.2 percent) felt they had been given enough information by SEA to make a "wise choice" about where to send their children to school. An almost equally large majority (83.6 percent) felt it was all right for children to sometimes teach other children (a key element in many SEA programs), and 91.8 percent of the elementary parents surveyed said they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the SEA school their child had attended the year before.

Another survey was taken in the spring of 1973, this time by an SEA evaluation team. Again, there were agreements and disagreements. More than three-quarters of the elementary parents surveyed said the SEA programs offered for their children were "adequate" to meet educational goals. But an almost even split showed up among secondary parents, with 32 percent saying that the choices available for their children were adequate, 38 percent saying they were not, and 29 percent being classed as neutral. The new survey showed that, in general, parents of SEA children were happy with their schools, and that the general level of excellence was rising. The 1971 survey had shown than 36 percent of all SEA parents thought SEA schools were getting better; the 1973 survey showed that figure had grown to almost 60 percent.

The surveys seemed to show that communication was going on in Southeast Alternatives, and that parents and teachers and students were talking and working together.

The Five Experimental Schools

Tuttle

At Tuttle, the so-called "contemporary" school, the teacher is thought to be the central figure in deciding the successes of the school program. According to the "official philosophy" of the school, as spelled out in SEA records, "Education is more effective when innovation extends from a base of proven pedagogy. Success should not be discarded in favor of pure experimentation. However, change is con-

temporary, and Tuttle is the contemporary school." As originally envisioned, parents at Tuttle were to be involved in the school primarily through the PTA and teacher conferences.

Pratt-Motley

A slightly higher degree of parent involvement is seen at the Pratt-Motley continuous-progress schools. Under the plan, Pratt is for "primary," or kindergarten through third grade children, and Motley is for "intermediate," or fourth through sixth graders. Those are rough breakdowns, however, and where a child attends is based on his or her learning level. At any rate, no child spends less than six years nor more than eight years going through the two schools. At Pratt, mornings are devoted to basic skills: math, reading, language arts. The afternoons are open for special-interest classes which run four weeks at a time. One day a week, children are allowed "just for the fun of it" activities. Mornings are also devoted to basics at Motley, with afternoons set aside for two-week-long mini-courses. The basic approach is that 60 percent of a child's time is decided by teachers, while the other 40 is decided by the child and the parent, who choose from among programs set up by the faculty and staff. Parents and other Southeast residents are encouraged to teach mini-courses or tutor basic skills classes.

Marcy

At the Marcy Open School, the degree of parental and community involvement moves up a notch. Parent committees have been set up to work with the teaching staff in equipping and designing classroom areas, to help set up evaluation systems for the children and to encourage parents and interested members of the community to participate regularly in the activities of the school.

The school places heavy emphasis on how children get along with each other, their teachers, their parents and their community. To enhance the ways children cope with their world, the students and teachers at Marcy have been set up as "families." There is one small family for ages 5 through 8 and four large families of children aged 5 to 11. The larger families are subdivided into two groups, ages 5 to 8 and 8 to 11. The students themselves are allowed to become involved in any activities at the school, either within the families themselves or in the several special-interest centers set up around the school (workshop, media center, etc.).

During "quiet times," students concentrate on basic skills, usually doing the work in small groups. Families also meet as a group three times a day for discussion and interaction. Older children are encouraged to help younger ones. The basic role of the teacher is to find out students' strengths and weaknesses and get the kids started on projects that will correct or amplify their abilities, and then "play an indirect role in the learning process by asking guiding questions and introducing new materials," says the SEA document on Marcy.

Free School

At the top of the "educational freedom" spectrum is the Free School, a small, 160-student school quite different from most "average" schools found today in the United States. Putting a label or classification on the SEA Free School is not easy and any attempt would meet with some resistance from Free School parents, teachers and students. The emphasis is not on learning for learning's sake, but learning as a tool to accomplish whatever it is the student wants out of life. The Free School emphasizes "doing your own thing," but also stresses knowing what the consequences of doing your own thing might be. Students, parents, faculty, and the community approach education with a view toward understanding "arenas" of life like power/politics, men/women, values/choice, ethics/justice. The strokes are inserted by the Free School on purpose to show that the words are paired nouns that "pose fundamental human issues, thus fundamental education issues."

The Free School seems loud, open, to some even vulgar, and its goals are sometimes contrary to what is considered good education in many education circles and in many communities. The conflicts between the faculty and the students, between the parents and the faculty, between the school and the central administration are all studied as part of society; the goldfish in the bowl turns student and studies the bowl and the people looking through the bowl. The Free School ethic speaks of "survival skills," and sees its role as one of preparing young people to become self-sufficient in a cold and usually hostile world.

One of the major goals of having the Free School as an alternative in SEA is to see if it seems possible to have such an institution operating within a "regular" school district. It has some features that would make most budget-conscious school administrators reach for the axe — a low teacher-pupil ratio. One of the major goals of the school is to get away from that axe; to prove to others that by most educational standards of the 1970s its students have been educated, but that they have also picked up something along the line that most schools overlook.

Plans for the next several years call for the Free School to reduce its teaching staff even more. The educational process hopefully will be carried out by the mechanism of the school itself, a mechanism that sees the role of the parent as vital. Students will teach students, student teachers will be on hand, parents will teach, and specialists (teachers who double as friends, counselors, mother and father confessors, fellow human beings) will develop methods orchestrating what the school sees as the real classroom: the world. There is even an attempt being made to see if the principal can be absorbed by the school/community. A principal, in the Free School view, is part of the "other" educational process where somebody (an authority of some sort) tells somebody else (teachers, students, the community) what is right and wrong in education and thus in the world.

The school is governed by a 22-member board, composed of 10 students, 7 parents and 5 staff members. The school director was hired

by the council. Until now there has been no great confrontation between the central office and the Free School about such things as hiring the director. It is a favorite joke around the Free School that when somebody from the central office calls asking for a decision, they don't know who to ask for. "We have to tell them to wait until we discuss it in the board, get a concensus, then tell them what the decision was," one parent on the Free School board says.

Kent sees the Free School as the tip of the "who's-in-charge-around-here?" iceburg, and admits that balancing the goals and aspirations of an often vexing and usually brash free school against the aspirations of an administration and school board concerned with the whole Minneapolis school district is one of the meatier educational problems facing alternative education in Minnesota.

Marshall-University High School

Finally, there is the secondary school in the experiment, Marshall-University High School. Marshall-University high awards diplomas to Free School students who can pass qualifying tests. The school tries to be a miniature SEA in itself, offering a variety of options to junior high and high school students.

There are two groups of students at Marshall-U High: senior high students and what are called "transitional" students, and those in seventh and eighth grades. For junior high level students, there are graded, ungraded, and open classes for students to pick from. The hope is that there will be an alternative available that will mesh with whatever SEA elementary experience a student has had.

For the senior high students, four alternatives have been set up. First, there are small counseling groups, wherein class choices, personal goals and career aspirations (if any) are discussed with teacher guides. Second, there are quarter-term courses, with a number of choices available within specific subject areas. Third, there are "multi-disciplinary" courses, another high falutin' phrase which means that you do a whole lot of things at once. One example is the "Project Aware" classes, where students from various class levels spend weeks together studying math, natural science, and other things, all using the great outdoors as the classroom. Finally, there is a plan that allows the student "autonomy," to proceed at his own rate. The student draws up the course work, then confers regularly with his teacher who acts as a tutor.

Evaluation

One of the basic ideas behind the experiment in Southeast Minneapolis is that you learn by doing, and that mistakes are part of the process; they are, indeed, an essential part of the experiment. The SEA has had its share of blind alleys and wrong turns as well as successes.

In 1972, an evaluation of the SEA's first year of operation was released. The study, prepared by national educational consulting firms

and aided by staff work by Augsburg College in Minneapolis, was based on 5,000 hours of observations at SEA schools.

The report, while generally favorable about what had been observed, was hard on some aspects of the program, particarly the Marcy Open School and the SEA Free School. The report suggested that at Marcy, children sometimes "were not prepared to handle the freedom of choice to wander with no observable purpose." The Marcy community apparently recognized this, because in the first year of the experiment the school made some basic changes. The first few months the classes had been set up in a system with two "models," the first of which was two open classrooms, with about 25 students each, and the second, serving the rest of the student body, as a network of subject area interest centers. The concept didn't work out, according to one parent, because "the kids were not seeing enough other kids and it got confusing about who was doing what, where and when." So in December, the "family system" described earlier, was introduced. Recognition that there was different achievement at different age levels led to the sub-families being started.

At the Free School, which took some heavy digs from the evaluators, the major complaint seemed to be a lack of coordination and what was described as a problem with projects being set up and then not taking place. The report said that as of the first week of April (the near-end of the 1971-72 school year) "only 50 percent of the scheduled secondary classes had actually happened; in the second week, 58 percent; in the third week, 71 percent." Classes failed, the report said, because "students and staff have sometimes failed to show up." There are those at the Free School who argue that given what the school is trying to do, the fact that students and staff failed to show is of little importance in the long run because that was their choice and they must take the consequences, if any. And, as a small irony, the Free School community itself decided after that first year that it had been a little too free — it was decided that some of the younger children, who would have been in elementary schools in a normal classroom situation, had not been learning their three R's.

Tony Morley, the director of the Free School, put it this way: "It is not the gift of freedom to not learn math. And basic skills cannot be scrapped in the name of freedom. This is not a total do-your-own-thing place. There are other values. There is no way a school can teach everything a child has to learn . . . what we are trying to do here is teach them how to learn."

The report also noted that there were problems at the other SEA schools, too. At the Pratt-Motley paired schools, for example, observers noted a problem with measuring student progress. The community — staff, teachers, parents — revised the measuring procedures, and made additional changes, such as allowing students to make program choices and allowing students more choice of personal goals. At Marshall-U High, observers said that planning was "sporadic at best" in the junior high areas, and said that the relationship be-

tween the school and the rest of the experiment was not all it could have been.

One of the major problems observers noted that first year was the lack of planning and preparation. Final approval of the experiment's funding did not come until June and the schools were supposed to be opened for business that fall. It was, as one SEA administrator said, "a hurried procedure." Yet, in spite of it all – rushed planning, changes in methods, uncertainty about some goals and the definition of those goals – the SEA seems to have prospered, at least in the minds of some leading Minneapolis educators.

At a school board meeting early in 1973, after almost two years of SEA experience, board member Richard F. Allen, a constant supporter of alternative education, suggested that a study be made of how much trouble it would be to put alternative education programs throughout the city.

"Our ingenuity will be tried if we are to offer viable choices and options for our children," says John B. Davis, Jr., the superintendent of schools, "but that is not a reason to back off. My guess is that these programs will be more expensive, but that is a discovery that will be helpful to make. This administration has all along been dedicated to offering choice to students. This dedication will continue." At least two elementary schools have set up what they call alternatives in Minneapolis, and in both cases, the courses are described as being "similar to those over in SEA." Furthermore, the climate seems to be favorable in Minneapolis for an expansion of alternatives and some of that credit must lie with the successes of the SEA experiment thus far.

The board of education has authorized a decentralization program that has set the city into three major areas, each headed by what is called an "area superintendent," or sort of super-principal. The SEA project is, at the moment, a separate area by itself, but its future as a separate entity is uncertain once federal funding runs out. Under the decentralization plan, each area superintendent is left pretty much alone. And the man who is their boss, Harry Vakos, the deputy superintendent, says he has a simple philosophy: "The area superintendents are in the saddle. They can do just about anything they want to do. All I do is coordinate things and make sure that board policy is being adhered to . . . and since the school board endorsed alternative education, each area can have alternatives, if it is decided by the parents and the staff that such alternatives are desirable."

But Superintendent Davis is right, and alternative education – financed locally, not federally as is the case in SEA – is more expensive than "regular" education. Minneapolis faces a major decision in the near future. The city, like most metropolitan areas, is losing students, about five percent a year. In addition, school districts in Minnesota are tightly restricted by state law as to how much they can levy against property taxes. There appears to be sentiment on the school board for some serious belt-tightening. Given all these factors, alternative education in Minneapolis may be confined to Southeast in the

future, and may even be curtailed there. It is one thing for Uncle Sam to pay for educational programs, and quite another for local districts to pay those same costs.

In addition, there is a simple problem faced by Chief Administrator Jim Kent: how do you export an ideology?

> *I can't say that what will work at Marcy or the Free School or Pratt-Motley is going to work in other schools in Minneapolis, let alone the rest of the country. We are trying to see what can successfully take place here, in our area. I am not at all sure that what we have learned here is exportable. There is only one truth, I guess: what works for one group may not work for another. The community involvement and response of parents that seems proper and fitting in Southeast Minneapolis may not be proper anywhere else in the nation."*

And, finally, comes Jim Kent's pocket philosophy of education which, though uttered in an instant might take decades to put into reality:

> *If you're a parent, or a member of a community interested in education, or a teacher, anybody really, the first thing you have to do to make any waves is figure out who you are and what you want. You do this before you buy the first book, alter the first classroom, hire the first teacher. Decide what your community is, what it wants, and then how to work with it, for it, against it if you want, but figure out what it is. Sitting around complaining about education won't do any good until and unless you figure out what you mean by education. If you are true to the practice and philosophy of alternative education, each school community must make its own decision. We have been able to demonstrate well what works for our Southeast community."*

Editor's Note:

Since this chapter was written the five-year federal funding which supported the Southeast Alternative experiment has ended, as planned. However, unlike many other federally supported programs, the wind has not left SEA sails. The alternative schools are now vital components of the Minneapolis school system, and will continue to operate as they have for the past five years.

James Kent, the director of the project for four of its five years and now Superintendent of Schools in Marlboro, Massachusetts, said, "Not only has SEA been successful in offering parents and students the kind of education they want, but the idea has been adopted citywide in Minneapolis.

Kent feels that SEA was successful because of the efforts of the parents, students, and school people to develop education alternatives, and because of their dedication to participation in decision making up and down the line. Committed parents are now an integral part of SEA alternative schools, and will survive changes in administration and funding.

A good example of how participation works in Minneapolis is the SEA experiment's experience with desegregation. Long before formal desegregation plans were drawn for the city, hundreds of meetings with Minneapolis citizen groups were held. Meetings revealed strong interest by parents in choosing the kind of education they wanted for their children as well as a choice of schools. SEA provided living proof that integrated schools could work and work well for all students. Experience with SEA and with parents and citizens gave the Minneapolis School Board confidence to vote unanimously for a citywide system of alternatives at both the elementary and secondary levels.

The SEA experiment has provided a model for other U.S. cities facing desegregation orders. Over 5000 superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, and students have visited the schools looking for the key to successful desegregation. Minneapolis leadership was a vital element, leadership that was committed both to making desegregation work and to encouraging parents and students to be involved in as much of the decision making as possible. Parent response to a recent questionnaire supports SEA's claims of success: a whopping 93% reported that they were "very satisfied" with their SEA schools.

CHAPTER 11
Citizens Act to Change Schools

Velma A. Adams*

The phones didn't stop ringing. Anxious parents asked the same question, over and over: where will my children go to school in September? After years of delay and controversy, Boston's public schools were going to be desegregated by order of the Federal Court. Thousands of children would be reassigned and bused.

"The school committee wouldn't acknowledge that the court ruling of April 25, 1973, existed," said Mary Ellen Smith, coordinator of the City-Wide Educational Coalition. "This was the only place where parents could get any information about what schools their children would attend in the fall, and whether they would be bused. Actually, some districts were not affected at all, but people didn't know that. By February we'd had 1500 calls."

Anticipating the situation, the Coalition's staff and volunteers, working in a grubby downtown office, plotted the school districts on the map according to the court-ordered plan. When the person answering the phone — usually a female volunteer — could give a definite answer to a query, she did. When she couldn't she promised to call back. Callers often invited someone from CWEC to attend neighborhood meetings. No matter when or where the meeting was, CWEC had someone there to answer questions.

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The group's goal was to cool the situation before fall by getting the information out — telling parents and students how they were to be affected by the desegregation plan or that they were not affected at all. "Most parents will send their kids to the school designated," predicted Mary Ellen Smith, organization coordinator. Just in case there is any trouble, CWEC had a rumor-control hot line working in September and was pressuring the mayor and the police department to join the effort to make the long-delayed transition smooth and safe.

Action Sparked by Crisis

Most citizen action groups such as City-Wide Educational Coalition are born in crisis. Theirs is the story of people fed up and angry, tired of backing the politicians and the entrenched bureaucratic agencies. They are parents and taxpayers who no longer believe that the system knows best how their children should be educated and their money spent. They are not willing to accept decisions which they had no part in making.

Citizen groups often begin with a small nucleus of dissatisfied people responding to a single issue. They see a problem and envision a possible solution. By rounding up volunteers and getting people out to meetings they demonstrate the clout necessary to make school authorities and politicians listen, discuss issues, and make changes.

The original issue may be almost anything — busing, budgets, curriculum, personnel appointments, education of the handicapped, or any one of dozens of controversial school policies. When the issue is resolved, the group may dissolve. Or a new issue may surface and the group's members, energized by their success, may continue their activities for another cause. New issues often attract new members, or may lose some who were excited only by the earlier issue.

Groups that live long after the initial crisis sometimes evolve into research and information centers, supplying facts for those who want to act. This approach — attempting to accomplish reforms by working through the system rather than confronting it — is too slow and moderate for some groups to tolerate in a crisis situation.

Examples of Urban Action Groups

The issue that sparked CWEC's organization as a group in 1972 was the appointment of a new superintendent by the Boston School Committee. Many districts in the city have been unrepresented by the five-member committee, which is elected at large and has always been all-White. CWEC believed that citizens should have more say in the selection of a superintendent and managed to interest about 150 citizens in trying to influence the choice. In the months following Superintendent William Leary's appointment, CWEC concentrated on trying to effect changes which the superintendent could implement. They had some successes, but by 1974 they became embroiled in the turmoil over desegregation and busing.

Washington

Unlike CWEC, the 10-year-old D.C. Citizens for Better Public Education (DCCBPE) tries to stay out of personnel decisions and individual problems. Its approach to improving public education in Washington, D.C. has always been moderate but forceful.

"We don't get into open fights," said Nancy Harrison, executive director. "When we are trying to fight the school system, we clobber them with information."

This is not because Washington's problems are any less critical than Boston's. In 1964, when D.C. Citizens was formed, the District of Columbia had been officially desegregated for ten years, but little improvement in public education was evident, particularly for Blacks. The board of education was still being selected by district judges and meeting during the day. Only those able to take the day off could attend. People felt that the board did not represent them and was unresponsive to their needs. Student transfers to private schools, resegregation, children unable to read, and dropouts were all on the rise.

In response, a number of prominent Washington citizens organized to focus attention on the plight of the schools, to give idealistic middle-class people a chance to work on educational problems whether or not they had children in the schools, and to draw the attention of government officials to the educational needs of the city.

The approach adopted by D.C. Citizens for Better Public Education, as stated in its corporate charter, was to "study on a continuing basis the problems of public education in the District of Columbia, to stimulate interest in the public schools, to encourage participation in volunteer programs in the public schools, and to propose and promote such changes in the organization, management, and methods of the public schools as may from time to time be deemed desirable."

Many problem areas have been uncovered by DCCBPE. The organization's thorough research and dissemination of information gets the facts into the open for public debate. Several staff members have become specialists on key subjects such as school budgets and special education.

In 1974, prior to teacher contract negotiations, the group published a few facts. Washington has the shortest teaching day in the country, for example. D.C. Citizens urged the union and management to publicize the issues under debate in contract negotiations prior to the actual negotiations. The organization was also studying the effects of moving teachers around in order to equalize per-student expenditures. Analyzing the school budget and translating it into understandable language are ongoing projects of the group.

Queens, New York

In contrast to D.C. Citizens, which has little direct contact with individual students, the primary goal of the Queens Lay Advocate Services (QLAS) is to provide direct para-legal assistance to parents and

students to resolve individual grievances. Rather than working for blanket change, QLAS works with individuals to assure that they get fair treatment. Disseminating information is secondary.

Volunteer lay advocates — university students, housewives, and other interested persons — accompany children and parents to meetings with administrators and try to arrange solutions to meet student needs, whether arranging for the student to stay in his or her present school or finding immediate placement in another school.

The bulk of the cases involve suspensions. There are 16,000 recorded suspensions per year in the New York City schools; the real number is certainly higher. In 1972 there were also 2,000 students out on medical suspensions ranging from a month to a year. Many of these suspensions are meted out as punishment, (in effect, banishment), and are against written policy. "New York has the best laws there are," said Miriam Thompson, QLAS founder and coordinator. "Either the schools don't know that students are to be suspended only in an emergency or they don't support the concept."

When Miriam Thompson started QLAS in 1970 with a grant from the Civil Liberties Defense and Education Fund, even her friends gave the organization little chance for survival. Four years later, QLAS was still providing advocates in more than a hundred cases each year. It has been instrumental in a number of legal decisions, the most significant of which was *Reid* v. *Board of Education*, a class action appeal on which New York State's Commissioner of Education, Ewald B. Nyquist, ruled in November, 1973.

The Commissioner decided that New York City was violating the state constitution and the state education law which provides for public education for all handicapped children, whether physically, mentally, emotionally, or socially handicapped. Commissioner Nyquist directed the board of education and the chancellor to immediately place all handicapped students in public school classes or in private schools under contract with the board, and to discontinue illegal suspensions and use of an illegal "medical discharge register" to keep children out of school. Thus, the early work of QLAS in getting the board of education to codify and publish certain policies and practices — although this did not lead to implementation without court action — proved helpful in winning the court case.

Winning the case did not necessarily mean winning the battle, though. Concerned that compliance with the ruling might go only as far as lip service, QLAS continues to monitor school action regarding educating the handicapped.

In 1973, the Queens Lay Advocate Service formed a coordinated service with two other agencies in the area: Alternative Solutions for Exceptional Children, a group doing advocacy work in special education; and the Education Action Center, associated with the Office of Equal Opportunity. Their shared space on the fifth floor of an old office building near Queens Plaza in Long Island City includes a conference room containing three folding chairs and a makeshift table, and

several small offices with too few desks and chairs.

"There is never enough money nor enough counselors," said QLAS's Miriam Thompson, "and the problems are so overwhelming that we often ask ourselves, 'Can we turn the schools around?'"

Action in the Suburbs, Too

Compared with the diversity and magnitude of the problems in the cities, the challenges to suburban citizen action groups seem relatively clearcut and their goals easily attainable. But no change in a school system or a town's support is ever achieved without some organized effort, as David W. Knapp, president of the Madison (Connecticut) Educational Forum can testify. Also, when one goal is reached, another one is apt to surface, which is what keeps citizen action groups alive.

The Madison Educational Forum was started in 1970 by newcomers eager to reverse the trend to austerity budgeting and willing to oppose the Madison Taxpayers Association to accomplish it. Initially the goal was to get the school board to put forth an adequate budget. The Forum set out to publicize what the schools needed and to get support for it. Members drove around and put questionnaires in mailboxes; conducted studies and publicized the results in the local newspaper; published a newsletter giving dates, times and places of informal gatherings being held in private homes to discuss the schools; and telephoned members and others urging them to attend meetings.

In 1974, the Forum's activities had not changed noticeably, except that its membership — then numbering about 180 — was endorsing the school committee's budget and trying to drum up support for its passage. The proposed budget contained about half the increases in personnel and programs that the Forum had recommended.

"The first step was to get the board to put forth the budget," said David Knapp. "The next step was to get the public to vote for it. Since we only get about 1700 voters out of a possible 5300 voting on the town budget, a small minority can kill a budget. Actually, we expected to have a two-to-one margin in favor of it, and if the superintendent, who's a dynamic guy, stays on, we should have the school budget back in two or three years to the level the community wants and can support." Madison, a bedroom town of 10,000 population and 3,000 pupils, will still have one of the lowest tax rates in the state of Connecticut. With the budget battle at least partially won, the forum lost about 40 members. Knapp thought it might be time to disband. "When there's no crisis, it's hard to get people out to meetings," he said. "They are not that eager to come out to be educated." Members, however, showed an interest in further evaluation of the various schools and their programs, and the superintendent asked the Forum to continue.

Central Massachusetts

Central Massachusetts Citizens Involved in Education (CM/CIE) was organized precisely because of a general lack of public knowledge

and interest in the schools. The group's origin is atypical also in that the initiative came from within rather than from outside the school system.

There were no crises in the central Massachusetts schools in the early 1970's, no visible problems, no big controversial issues to stimulate citizen participation. The majority of children lived up to the expectations set for them and there was little or no citizen involvement with the schools beyond a social relationship. William P. Densmore, member of the state board of education, and a handful of educators (who point out that they are also citizens), decided that this relationship should change.

"Citizens need to look at themselves as consumers of the educational product and make sure they are satisified with what they are buying," said Densmore. "Since I've been on the state board of education, I have really been suprised at how rare it is for someone to come to me with something educational on his mind. This isn't public apathy about education; people just don't know how to deal with the system."

CM/CIE shows citizens how to deal with the system through its Citizen Resource Center in West Boylston where people can get information and do research. The center has a telephone service to answer questions about school policy.

Training coordinator Richard P. Boardman, Professor of Education at Clark University in Worcester, started a series of workshops and seminars to build a network of citizens who know how the school system works and who can organize groups in their own communities.

"It was clear from the beginning," said Boardman, "that the bulk of our program activities would have to be devoted to the area of sensitizing citizens to the value of collaboration and involvement in the public schools. When citizens begin to learn some of the differences between what they want for their children and what the schools in their community are providing; when citizens find out how their schools are doing relative to other places; then they'll begin to ask important, constructive questions." Subjects of the early CM/CIE seminars include "How to Change Your Schools," and "Educational Renewal and the Role of Citizen Involvement." Participants, however, were teachers and other school personnel.

Having school people use the Citizen Resource Center did not disturb the organizers. Although they profess belief in parent and community initiative, they also believe that leadership can come from within the system, too. This point of view may appear somewhat contradictory, and might be seen by citizen activists as tokenism or an outright attempt by the establishment to "head them off at the pass." "But there are individuals within the school system who want change," said Richard Boardman, "and it doesn't matter who initiates the idea as long as change happens."

Why Is Citizen Action Necessary?

Change will not happen, say citizen action groups, if education is

left completely to the schools and the parent-teacher associations (PTA's). Status quo-ism, indifference on the part of school boards, strong teacher unions, financial problems, the failure of innovative programs to get funding for widespread adoption, a scarcity of counselors, and racial antagonism are among the reasons cited. PTA's are seen as arms of the school committee, dominated by middle-class Whites, and run by teachers and principals.

"The problem is more a class problem than a racial problem," said Elaine Keith of the Education Action Center in Queens. "There are few PTA's in poor or Black neighborhoods. Counselors ore often more willing to discuss problems with middle-class parents. A school counselor calls White middle-class parents of a physically or emotionally handicapped child, suggests that the family put the child in a private school, and tells the parents how to get the tuition money from the state and city. Poor families are less apt to find out about funding and access to private schools. Middle-class children are less often hurt than poor children, and White children get hurt less than Black."

Few PTA locals work as child advocates. Many avoid taking a stand on educational issues and deserve their tea party image. But there are signs that some PTA's, with urging from their national leadership, are stirring and in some cases becoming more forceful and more involved in educational issues.

Leaders of other parent and citizen groups often view the PTA as ineffective or as simply a rubber stamp for school officials. In Boston, the director of the Home and School Association is paid by the schools. "As an arm of the school department, the association focused on anti-busing for years and refused to deal with educational reform issues," reported Mary Ellen Smith. "Therefore, the association is non-existent in Black, Spanish, and Chinese neighborhoods, and has had minimal involvement in integrated neighborhoods."

"A PTA represents only one school," said David Knapp, "whereas the Educational Forum represents all of Madison (Connecticut). Also, PTA members can't lobby, they won't analyze a school or principal critically, and they never go for budget increases."

There is little hope that individuals can have much impact on schools unless they organize into groups and pool their knowledge of how to work through the system. No other institution is ready to absorb the advocacy work done by citizen action groups. "But people can make a difference if there is a mechanism for mobilizing the community's resources," said Mary Ellen Smith, organizer of Boston's City-Wide Educational Coalition.

What Groups Have Achieved

The Queens Lay Advocate Service was encouraged to find referrals coming in from parents of former cases and sympathetic teachers, as well as from the New York Civil Liberties Union and from friends of the service.

"The system has become more careful in dealing with children and

parents," reported Miriam Thompson, QLAS coordinator. "The schools look for alternatives to suspension now. Only a small fraction of the cases in Queens now go to a lawyer. Most are resolved through the patient work of advocates who accompany each individual through the administrative process."

QLAS was instrumental in opening up school records to New York City parents. Miriam Thompson explained, "School officials were embarrassed to have parents see opinions like 'Mother is a troublemaker' and the parents were distressed that student files contained comments that could not be documented and often were not factual." Queens teachers are now being trained to know what belongs in a student's record, and what doesn't.

In Boston, Mary Ellen Smith rated CWEC's first organized activity as one of its biggest successes. "We exposed the workings of the system, how tight and inbred it is, and the process by which the superintendent was appointed. We also made some input into the appointment," she claimed.

During the first four months of 1972, CWEC developed criteria for a new superintendent, including the credentials he or she should have and what his or her duties should be. The Coalition ran ads in the newpapers and asked graduate schools to have candidates apply, sending copies of their resumes to CWEC as well as to the school committee. CWEC got about sixty of the two hundred applications. They screened applicants, contacted some, got feedback from other cities, and selected five finalists, three of whom were from out of state. The three outsiders, who had excellent credentials, according to Mary Ellen Smith, were also on the school committee's list, along with seven candidates from within the system.

"The school committee would not acknowledge CWEC and let us interview the candidates," recalled Ms. Smith, "so we played undercover agent, meeting them at the airport and other places, and we managed to interview all the candidates. The School committee finally selected an in-house candidate, even though we felt all the out-of-state candidates were better qualified. Even so, we felt the exercise was worthwhile."

During the first two years of its existence, CWEC also worked out a "Community Agenda for the Boston Public Schools," recommending changes that the superintendent could implement. At the same time, volunteers were involved in numerous local school issues.

CWEC filed for incorporation in October, 1973. By 1974 the Coalition had 600 members, half from minority groups, and a 32-member board which included eight Black, one Spanish, one Indian, and three Chinese members. The group set up an information resource center and was working closely with the mayor's office to implement Boston's racial balance plan peacefully.

The Coalition received funding to set up a resource center to provide technical assistance to parent groups as well as services and information to parents and school people. "We want to get the parent-

teacher mechanism into every school in the city," said Mary Ellen Smith. Since then the staff has grown from one full-time and one part-time person with parent volunteers shouldering heavy loads, to a staff of thirty-six full-time paid people, thirty of whom are parents with children in the Boston schools.

Their primary agenda item soon became to assure the safety of the children attending newly desegregated schools. They helped parents organize around school issues and built a strong base of support as they maneuvered through one busing crisis after another. Once their constituency was established they began advocating educational reform. The staff of parents, educators, researchers, and community organizers respond to about 200 calls a day from parents and school people.

New funding from federal, state, and city governments, as well as grants from private foundations and Boston businesses distinguishes CWEC from many other urban citizen groups. The need for citywide communication about schools — something which the schools should have been providing — has been recognized and has resulted in their unusually rosy financial picture. "However," sighs Mary Ellen Smith, "even with the terrific response we've had so far, life for us is still a day-to-day, hand-to-mouth search for funding."

Two years ago the Coalition scrambled every month to meet the tiny payroll. And today they are a vital link between schools and those the schools are supposed to serve, with thirty-six people working to cement that link.

"We didn't push any of our own ideas at the beginning," says the dynamic director. "We listened to what people were saying, and tried to understand their needs. And we listened to all the people in this city, not just one faction or race or ethnic group. If we do our job well, there will be effective councils working in all the schools in Boston, and we'll be out of a job."

The Madison Education Forum, in the opinion of President David C. Knapp, also may attain its objective of a sound, balanced educational system within a few years. A townwide opinion survey conducted by the Forum revealed citizen opinion about the schools' curriculum and special services, discipline, administration, faculty, buildings and facilities, and budget, and in general how well residents felt that Madison schools met the overall needs of students.

"We got eight of the seventeen personnel we requested in the recent budget," said Knapp. "We're getting a music teacher in every school, a physical education teacher in every school, and a string music program. We would like to think that we drowned out the Madison Taxpayers Association and that the upward curve in spending will continue."

The Forum recently formed an association of "summer people," those property owners who live in the area only part of the year. "Communicating school budget plans to these people will make them more receptive to tax increases, we hope," said Mrs. Frances Sadek,

the current Forum president.

Central Massachusetts Citizen Resource Center continues to develop programs for parents and school people. Nancy Brown, the CRC director, is enthusiastic about the group's future.

"We had an outside evaluation of our programs," she explained. "We learned that we fill a real need in this area, that our programs are well done and useful, but that we need more exposure, need to let more people know about our work."

Program plans call for more publicity about workshops for parents on how to lead parent groups. CRC will also hold workshops for teachers on how to work with parents and workshops for any group on how to produce effective newletters. A six-week course on citizen participation in education will be held at a high school through their adult education program. CRC also plans to develop displays for ten public libraries with books and materials for parents and school people arranged by topics such as volunteerism, fact-finding, school budgets, school governance, and curriculum.

"Funding is a constant worry," said Nancy Brown. "With two part-time staff people and forty volunteers, we barely have enough time to plan and carry out programs. Time we spend searching for money means time we don't have to devote to what we really want to do."

Among the examples of citizen action groups described here, the 10-year old D.C. Citizens for Better Public Education appears to be the most stable. It occupies a neat, well-appointed office in the Health and Welfare Council building. Its part-time staff is equivalent to about ten full-time people. It has numerous research and study contracts, and is the only school-oriented program to receive funding from the United Givers Fund, which pays about half of the budget. Members number about seven hundred, and there are about two thousand names on the mailing list. About fifty percent of the contributors are White, although ninety-five percent of Washington's students are Black.

The first project sponsored by D.C. Citizens was the "Reading is Fun-damental" Committee, headed by Mrs. Robert S. McNamara. A gaily decorated delivery truck labeled "Reading is Funmobile" distributed 205,000 books to 41,000 children. For many it was the first opportunity to select and keep a book; the report on the project is appropriately titled *This Book Belongs to . . . Me!* Reading is Fundamental became a national project and moved to the Smithsonian Institute. Other projects have spun off. Project MEN, matching eighth grade boys with role models, was picked up by the school system. A course in street law, for which Georgetown University law students get course credit, was being expanded to all twelve high schools in the fall of 1974, and has also been picked up by the system. "One Black law student and one White is assigned to each school," explained Nancy Harrison. "They relate well to the high school students and offer a survey of consumer, criminal, and juvenile laws."

D.C. Citizens has been able to do research that the school system

could not do and to develop experts in certain areas. Its major activity is budget work. "The school system makes it impossible for citizens to understand the budget," said the executive director. "We have a specialist on the staff in budgeting and also one in special education who goes to bat for a child who needs help."

Among the other problems that D.C. Citizens have brought to the surface is the short work day of teachers, allowing no time for parent conferences, planning, or services. The result is an inordinately high hourly salary.

A study of the effects of teachers' equalization pay began in 1974, funded by the National Institute of Education. "Equalization within the District of Columbia has been very disruptive for three years," explained Nancy Harrison. "Teachers get moved around from school to school to equalize per-student expenditures. When our study is completed, lawyers will be able to show the court that the scheme won't work."

The philosophy behind D.C. Citizens and other action groups is to help parents and community people make informed choices. "We help parents find out what they ought to know and what they can achieve," said the director of D.C. Citizens. "We give them information they would never get otherwise, since there is no school newsletter. We have fantastic committees which produce excellent reports. We find people with a particular interest in a subject and assign them to explore it. Our files are excellent; people come in here to get material for their dissertations. And we've been in business so long that we're not easily fooled. We have learned to look behind the obvious."

Every Group Has Problems

Problems common to the majority of citizen action groups are the need for leadership; a shortage of capable, sensitive volunteers; and adequate funding.

Good leadership often comes from former school people familiar with the bureaucracy who know where the bottlenecks are. "You need the knowhow from having been inside the system," said Mary Ellen Smith, a former Boston teacher who was fired for supporting a community group. "But it is easier to bring about change if you are on the outside. Those inside the system who really want change, as well as those who don't, need outside support and pressure."

Funds are generally limited, particularly in urban areas like New York City. "There is no way for an advocacy group to become self-supporting after initial private foundation funding runs out," said Miriam Thompson of the Queens Lay Advocate Service. An ombudsman, she feels, is less threatening and might possibly be funded by the schools.

A surprisingly large portion of citizen action funding comes from school and government support, and from other establishment sources, even though the groups may be advocating actions that neither the school authorities nor the politicians favor. Membership

dues, research and study grants, and public benefits bring in additional dollars, but group leaders are never very far away from fundraising. D.C. Citizens for Better Public Education is unique in being partially supported by the United Givers Fund, but it has had to take a new approach to raising money through benefit performances at the Kennedy Center. "Washington has been benefitted to death," said Nancy Harrison, "so in 1974 D.C. Citizens sent out a notice of a 'no-benefit benefit' asking our members and friends simply to send in their contributions."

Conclusion

To provide effective leadership for a citizen action group, as those who have tried it know, takes hard work, determination, and the ability to seek out and put to work the energies of those in the community who have time and knowledge to contribute. "To lead the way you need brave people, willing to stick their necks out, do battle, and become unpopular," said Madison's David Knapp. "There are very few people who can attract and rally people to them and to a cause."

Directors and coordinators of citizen action groups must continually publicize their activities through flyers, workshops, attendance at meetings, and press conferences. Ideally, staff members and a goodly number of volunteers will be informed, articulate persons, some of whom are meeting-oriented and can think on their feet or negotiate. The key question, always, is: What brought us to this point and how can we resolve the situation?

Membership and the roster of volunteers will change as problems and needs change. But the need for a way for parents and community people to participate in public school affairs will always exist.

CHAPTER 12
Perspectives and Future Directions

Don Davies

The Institute for Responsive Education supports and encourages public participation in educational decision-making for two reasons — one based on ideology, the other rooted in practicalities. First is our belief that people affected by decisions of institutions and government agencies should have a voice in making those decisions. The second is that lasting and constructive change is most likely if those affected by the change are involved in planning and decision-making. Changes and improvement in schools are badly needed. Better collaboration between school people and community people is one way to increase the likelihood of significant, purposeful change.

These ideas are being tested in a wide variety of settings and in extraordinarily diverse ways all across the country at a time when people are wavering between cynicism and optimism, apathy and involvement.

Activism and Apathy: Side by Side

As advocates of citizen participation we see the mid-1970's as both the best of times and the worst of times. Many people have a low and declining trust in government and social institutions. In poll after poll, low credibility ratings are given to the president, Congress, politicians, the media, hospitals, lawyers, schools, and school boards. Traditional American optimism about "the future" has been dimmed. Skepticism abounds about liberal social programs. Schools everywhere are under attack. The rigidities of governmental and institutional bureaucracies seem to many to be beyond the reach of citizens seeking

change. Many people are totally preoccupied with their private lives and concerns, look inward to themselves, their pocketbooks, their families, and their immediate neighborhoods. For others, the struggle to make a living or raise a family is exhausting and all-consuming. Cynicism and apathy about the state of the nation is alive and real.

But there is another side to the story. More people, and a broader range of people, are involved in various forms of citizen action than at any other time in our national history. The widespread community activism of the civil rights movements, the anti-Vietnam War efforts, student protests, and the anti-poverty era have sown seeds throughout the society, particularly in the large middle class. Citizen coalitions are redirecting state and metropolitan highway and transportation policies; taking industries to task for pollution or price-fixing; challenging political parties, city councils, hospitals, the media, school boards, and big business on a mind-boggling array of issues; and carrying every kind of political banner from far left to far right. More people trust Ralph Nader than trust and respect their elected officials. Consumerism, citizen action, and the emergence of new forms of participatory democracy are also alive and real.

A mix of apathy and activism exists in good measure in the society and in many individuals today. We are pulled in two directions at once. The result is often confusing to researchers and scholars, but many people do understand the seeming contradiction or dialectic. Such coexistence is normal and natural and a good reflection of a society that increasingly tolerates or even welcomes widespread diversity of life styles, points of view, and values.

Many people understand intellectually that democracy, freedom, the good life, good government, good institutions, and good communities are a process not a product. People do understand that "the American dream" is a journey, a search, and an often-confusing exploration — not a play in which the curtain is about to go up on the final act. Many people often understand, better than many scholars, that apathy and activism, privatism and social commitment will always exist side by side and that the search for a viable democracy must allow for skeptics and elitists who do not believe in it at all.

The examples of citizen participation in these pages demonstrate ways in which people have become involved in non-threatening ways and have attracted the support of those hesitant about "politics" and "confrontation." Many of the examples show how new energy can be tapped for activities in the schools which are real, which have tangible personal pay-offs and satisfaction, and which do not require unrealistic commitments of time. The case studies document small-scale, local efforts built on principles of democratic participation which have succeeded in improving education and making a healthier society. Here we examine these scattered experiences in terms of their implications for action. We will look first at various aspects of programs — their goals and characteristics — and then at ways in which people are involved — their roles, responsibilities, and needs.

Program Goal: Reform Not Abolition

Proposals for deschooling the society, or deinstitutionalizing it can be dangerous flights of fancy. Talk of law without courts, politics without parties, religion without churches, and education without schools and colleges has romantic appeal to some, but is contrary to the fact that all societies function through some types of institutions. Joseph Featherstone establishes this point clearly in his introduction. The work of the hundreds of men and women in our eleven cases underlines the need to build new institutions and to rework and rethink existing ones.

The goal of most of the participants described in these pages has been reform, not abolition. They have been successful at reshaping rather than abolishing institutions and at organizing people for effective action. This was true in Louisville and Lagunitas, in Crystal City and Minneapolis. In these cases, as with much of the participatory activity across the country in the 1970's, the aim is changing, improving, and reworking — hence, strengthening schools and school systems. The great majority of the nation's children will continue to be in the public schools. These schools are with us for the forseeable future despite the claims of some that they have had little success in curing poverty, racism, or crime. What the schools, especially the public schools, do will continue to have genuine, personal importance for the children who attend them, their parents, and the broader community. The goal of improving the schools is real and compelling for school councils, such as those in Los Angeles and Louisville, for existing citizen groups, and for fledgling organizations. This goal provides what every organization effort must have if it is to succeed — a clear, unifying purpose, a sense of direction which makes it possible to develop sensible strategies.

For some groups described in this book — and many others — the goal is different. It is to develop new and alternative institutions. The aim is not to destroy existing public schools but to change them by example and competition. The mobilizing purpose is to provide for oneself and one's children an alternative to what the larger system offers. The impoverished schools in the Milwaukee Federation and the affluent Nueva School both illustrate how having a choice among educational programs can be a powerful organizing principle around which parents, citizens, and educators can find common cause. But as it is with efforts to improve the public schools, the task is a positive one — institution-building.

Representation Plus Participation

Community council members in West Virginia, Indian parents, the teachers and community people in the Roosevelt School area in Louisville do not talk much about democracy. Neither do most of the parent and citizen group leaders that the Institute for Responsive Education works with around the country. But democracy is central to

what these people are about. They are challenging those time-honored elitist ideas that democracy means electing representatives to Congress, city councils, and school boards and that democratic participation means mostly voting. They challenge by building a base of grassroots participation under and alongside representative bodies and the traditional ballot-box approach to good citizenship. This stance fits logically in a governmental system designed to rest on "the consent of the governed." It also provides citizens with an opportunity to influence an institution which affects them. Without some sense of control over their lives, citizens become apathetic, cynical, and alienated. New modes of participation, therefore, enhance existing decision-making processes and help obviate harmful side-effects of non-participation.

A healthy democratic society is built on both *representation* (electing officals from the President to the school board) and *participation* (being involved in planning, policy- and decision-making, and in evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of elected officials). The two ideas are different sides of the same coin. Schools are a good proving ground for efforts to combine the democracy of representation with the democracy of participation in a way that will strengthen both.

Program Goal: Decisions Close to Home

If participatory democracy, as demonstrated at Louisville's Roosevelt School, is to be a reality, some important aspects of decision-making must be decentralized. Decentralization is a key ingredient for giving neighborhoods and communities more "say" about their schools. It may mean transferring important decision-making powers from the central school district office or school board to smaller districts and to individual schools or it may mean transferring authority from the Bureau of Indian Affairs offices to the schools where Indian children are. It may mean, as in Minneapolis, deliberately encouraging different policies and practices in individual schools.

Many educators and school board members fear decentralization, especially when it involves new authority for citizen boards and councils, because it appears to mean a simple loss of power. Such a view is based on the assumption that power is a limited commodity. But power is expandable; the sharing of power is not a "zero-sum" game in which some win and some lose. Decentralized decision-making, if it rests on principles of collaboration, can increase rather than decrease the impact and influence of top school administrators and elected school boards.

There is nothing mysterious or radical about the idea of making decisions "close to home" — close to the children, the classroom, the teachers, the neighborhood school building, and the community. Decentralization in school districts occurs when the central, elected board of education delegates significant responsibilities and decision-making powers to sub-district community boards or councils and/or to school councils for individual schools. The kinds of responsibilities that

are sometimes delegated include:

- selecting and evaluating the principal;
- selecting and evaluating teachers;
- identifying goals, priorities, and needs;
- setting budget priorities;
- evaluating the curriculum and extra-curricular activities;
- approving new school programs;
- improving community support;
- investigating student or parent problems and complaints.

There are, of course, serious dangers in oversimplified or naive demands for decentralized decision-making and control. A number of difficult questions must be faced squarely: What kinds of decisions must, should, or could be made at which levels? What are the advantages and disadvantages of making a specific decision at the federal level, the state, the district, the individual school, the classroom? What are the constitutional and legal requirements and constraints? For example, the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and its interpretation by the federal courts determines policies of racial integration in the schools which cannot be changed by decisions in a single classroom, school, or district. State-mandated tenure laws for teachers cannot be abolished by the action of a local school council. But decisions about necessary qualifications for teachers and administrators in a multi-racial, multi-lingual community and about the kind of language and cultural programs best suited to a particular community can probably best be made by the community and the professionals in an individual school.

Workable decentralization requires a sensible plan of checks and balances among individual schools, sub-district, the school district, the state, the federal government; among students, parents, teachers, citizens, administrators, employee organizations, and school boards. Wherever decision-making authority is placed, there must also be specific requirements for monitoring and holding decision-makers accountable.

Program Goal: Doing It Without Uncle Sam's Help

The success stories in this book should put to rest the myth that improved school/community collaboration requires federal pressure or financial support. Only in Wayne County, West Virginia, and Minneapolis was Uncle Sam's involvement of central importance. In Wayne County, a U.S. Office of Education program — the Urban-Rural School Development Program — was the catalyst for organizing the community to take a more active role in improving its schools. The dollars from Washington were helpful in this very economically depressed area, but Washington's bureaucratic sluggishness and confusing directions came close to derailing the local effort. In Minneapolis, the money from Washington made possible the development of a large and thoroughly documented experiment. Similar results

however, were achieved in Lagunitas on a much smaller scale, without outside money. The point should be clear: funding from the outside can sometimes be helpful; but it is almost always a mixed blessing and it is seldom an absolute necessity.

Those concerned about a larger role for local communities in school affairs need to assure that federal and state legislation and guidelines are written to encourage and enable rather than to prohibit or impede the kinds of new roles for parents and citizens described here. They should be alert to every possibility for using funds in federal and state programs to support school/community collaboration. For example, help in the form of information, materials, and technical assistance is available through federally-funded programs and centers and through state education agencies. Many of these agencies are not motivated or attuned to providing help and information to citizens and citizen groups. Their primary clients are school professionals. But, since the taxpayers foot the bill, they have every right to full service from public-supported agencies. They should vigorously exercise that right.

Even where federal guidelines mandate parent and community involvement in decision-making in the schools (as in Title I of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act), monitoring the effectiveness of such involvement is largely beyond the reach of Washington and requires local commitment and energy to assure that the spirit as well as the letter of the law is maintained. Such monitoring is an appropriate function of parent and citizen groups.

Program Goal: Many Forms of Collaboration

The ways in which school/community collaboration is taking place across the country are almost limitless in their variety and form. A major lesson from the chapters in this book and the other studies and surveys of the Institute for Responsive Education is that there is not one best way. No single approach is appropriate for all kinds of communities. Nor is any one approach necessarily sufficient for any community; a variety of activities may be needed to meet different and challenging purposes.

One way to categorize the variety of collaborative activities is to divide them according to four major purposes.

Resolving immediate problems or needs

This category includes the thousands of temporary advisory committees formed to work on problems ranging from school violence and vandalism, to racial tension to lack of adequate job opportunities and career counseling for young people.

There are countless other service activities related to helping meet specific needs or solve problems. Some examples: drug abuse counseling centers, cooperative after-school child care programs for working parents, counseling and information services for parents of handicapped children or children with learning disabilities,

community-run workshops for parents and teachers on local history and resources or relations between different racial and ethnic groups.

Some problem-solving activities are initiated by the schools, as when the school board appoints a special community advisory committee on school budget priorities. Others grow out of the concern of a group of parents or an existing organization such as the Chamber of Commerce or the League of Women Voters, and function independently of the school's governing structure. Some are friendly and collaborative in spirit; others, adversarial. Still others combine the two.

The kinds of problems or special needs that exist in any community provide a good starting point for schools and communities to begin to communicate with one another, tap new resources, and develop skills and motivation for continuing collaboration.

Involving parents more directly in their children's education

Countless examples exist in these pages and in communities in all parts of the country of efforts to involve parents in educational activities. Many volunteer programs fall into this category, as do programs designed to help parents learn to be more effective parents and to help their children learn. There are also many examples of parent/child projects and programs in areas such as environmental improvement, sports, and arts and crafts.

Beyond their obvious benefits for children and participating parents, involvement programs provide a good starting point for parents who will later want to participate actively in policy- and decision-making activities. Such programs provide personal communication between school people and parents which helps break down barriers of fear and misunderstanding on both sides.

Using community resources to enrich learning opportunities

The idea of the community as a resource for learning — an extension and supplement to what the school itself can offer — has caught on in many places and in many forms in recent years. Work-study programs are the largest and best-known example. But many other varieties can easily be found — oral history projects in which students interview long-time residents; artists and craftsmen opening their studios to students; projects for better utilization by students of public libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions; internship programs in city government, business, and industry and other agencies are only a few of hundreds of examples.

These forms of school/community collaboration are usually non-political, non-controversial, inexpensive, relatively easy to plan and operate, and provide good meeting grounds for school professionals and the community. Such efforts help children and teachers and are satisfying to community people providing help. But they also build bridges of communication and understanding between the institution known as school and the diverse communities of which it is a part.

Public participation in planning, policy development, and decision-making

These activities are the focus of the book. They include:

- district-wide and individual school policy and advisory committees and councils;
- planning and priority-setting projects;
- parent advisory councils mandated by Federal legislation such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Bilingual Education;
- local units of state and national organizations such as the League of Women Voters, Urban League, and the American Friends Service Committee, and the Chamber of Commerce, with school-related projects;
- citywide neighborhood groups such as community development centers, community action programs, neighborhood houses, racial and ethnic group organizations, with school-related studies and projects;
- citizens' groups formed specifically to work on school matters;
- alternative and community-controlled schools, such as the Milwaukee Federation of Independent Schools.

These are the kinds of activities that most people have in mind when they use the terms, "citizen participation" and "school/community collaboration." They are, in one way or another, political and controversial, as they require or seek changes in the traditional dominance of school professionals and elected boards of education in fundamental policy development and decision-making. They are, by and large, designed to give influence to parents and others in the community and to alter the way schools are governed. This is particularly true of those mechanisms which are a part of the school structure itself such as school councils.

The reader who is interested in getting new forms of collaboration started in his/her own community could use the categories and examples listed above as a check-list to determine the status of school/community collaboration in his/her community. Such a census of activities would be a useful beginning point to answer the questions: What kinds of school/community collaboration and citizen participation now exists? What results are these activities having? What other approaches might be needed?

Program Goal: Sustaining the Effort

Any program must be evaluated in terms of its unique — and possibly multiple — objectives. A short-term problem-solving activity may succeed not only in eliminating the problem but in establishing a base for future cooperative action. A volunteer program may both enrich school programs and increase community information about schools. For programs which aim to change decision-making structures, however, the long-term goals are the most crucial.

Parent and community interest is most easily mobilized around a burning issue or a school crisis – an outbreak of drug abuse or school vandalism, racial conflict, a controversy over school textbooks or desegregation, tearing down an old school, firing a principal. But a single hot issue or crisis alone is usually not enough to sustain an organization. Hundreds of crisis-generated organizations, advisory committees, and school/community task forces are spawned each year. Most of them fade away rather quickly.

The telling difference between most of these *Schools Where Parents Make a Difference* and many other efforts is that new roles for parents and other citizens were built into the system – a permanent, legally-recognized school council in Los Angeles and Louisville; reconstituted school board authority in Crystal City and the Indian communities; the establishment of regular incentives and programs for parent involvement in Minneapolis; a viable and continuing organization dealing with the full wide range of educational issues in Washington and Madison, Connecticut.

The difference is new forms of school/community collaboration and citizen participation built into the warp and woof of life in the school and community. This requires institutionalizing new policies, practices, and relationships and developing new "charters" which give legitimacy and promise of long life to arrangements that otherwise may be flimsy and fleeting.

People: Who Is Involved and How?

If programs for participation in educational decision-making establish new structures and mechanisms, everyone involved will be called on to perform in different ways. Defining and preparing for these new roles is extremely important.

Initiative: Who Starts Things Moving?

Initiative for school/community collaboration can come from many, often surprising sources. Sometimes, as in Louisville, a superintendent starts a program. Sometimes the initiative comes from a school principal like Sister Judy in Milwaukee; a parent such as Hazel Damron or Norman and Karen Stone; a VISTA volunteer; or a former teacher like Mary Ellen Smith of the Boston City-Wide Educational Coalition.

Initiative can come from established groups related to the school system – the school board, local or district parent-teacher-student organizations, a teachers' organization, an advisory committee. Or it can come from an existing community organization – the League of Women Voters, the Chamber of Commerce, citizen action groups, churches, civic associations. Initiative also emerges when a few parents get together over coffee to talk about starting a new organization to work on school problems.

For things to happen, an individual, handful of individuals, or group must invest time and energy to clarify problems, needs, and goals and to mobilize the interests and energies of others.

Whatever the source of initiative, efforts to involve "the community" should be built on the principle of broad participation. Specific and serious efforts are required to make sure that any organization program or activity is open to representatives of diverse parts of a community. Factors to be considered include age, race, religion, sex, ethnic background, occupation, geographic area or neighborhood, educational background and income, varying political viewpoints.

People: Don't Throw Out the Pro's

Featherstone attacks excessive professionalism at the same time that he recognizes the importance of educational expertise in classrooms and administrative offices. The new professionalism he calls for is based on imaginative coalitions between professional and parents. The good sense of the idea of coalitions of parents and professionals is demonstrated in the Louisville, Los Angeles, and the Nueva school stories and in countless other places. The damaging results of throwing out the experts in the name of democracy or community control have also been documented in the story of some of the schools in the Milwaukee Federation and in a number of other places not discussed in this book.

The lesson is clear. Improving the schools in a lasting way requires, in Featherstone's words, "redirecting the priorities and allegiances of the two key sets of practitioners in schools, principals and classroom teachers, toward greater responsiveness to the children, the parents, and the community; and inventing new forms of school/community, professional, and non-professional communication and collaboration.

More, not less, professional expertise is needed. Good schools require good professionals. Few parents want their children or their schools managed by good-hearted amateurs. Even those citizen groups who choose adversarial approaches in working for school improvement need to keep in mind that the long-term goal is not for one side or the other to "win" or "lose," but for new alliances between teachers and parents. The practices illustrated in this book demonstrate the positive effects of harnessing professional talent to the needs and goals of students, parents, and the community. Both the Nueva and Minneapolis chapters show what is possible with responsive professionalism and honest collaboration.

People: New Sources of Talent

Professionals do not have a monopoly on talent and expertise. One way to combat narrow, inward-looking, self-protective professionalism is to locate and use community talent and resources. In Rocky Boys, old people of the tribe are resource persons who teach Cree language, customs, and history. In Crystal City, Chicano parents work with teachers in Chicano studies programs. All over the country parents and other community people by the thousands are working in the schools as volunteers and aides, paid and unpaid. Many thousands of

others are welcoming students to work and learn in their studios, businesses, offices, homes, and community agencies. In hundreds of communities, young people are initiating and carrying out projects and programs to help people of all ages and to work toward solving community problems.*

Using student, parent, and community resources to help children learn in no way detracts from the professionalism of educators. It expands and enriches the talents that are available for teaching and learning.

People: What Do They Need to Participate?

A careful reading of these chapters suggests that certain conditions are necessary for effective citizen action. Parker Palmer and Elden Jacobson identify four basic conditions for action:

1. People act when they have some sort of *self-interest* at stake.
2. People act when they have a *clear and compelling diagnosis* of the situation.
3. People act when they have a *meaningful prescription* (i.e., one that responds to the diagnosis).
4. People act when they have a *sense of power* to enforce the prescription.†

This analysis is based on common sense and it is confirmed by the experiences in this book. Yet, these simple ideas are often ignored by people — citizen leaders or school officials — seeking to stir citizens to action or to initiate activities that will promote school/community collaboration.

Too often altruism or personal sacrifice are sought as motivations for action. Too often rhetoric and exhortation are substituted for hard-headed thinking which leads to a diagnosis of the problems and clear, understandable ways to formulate these problems. Systematic planning procedures are ignored and prescriptions (or solutions) which fit the problems are missed. We often forget that the feeling that one's participation can make a real difference — a sense of power — is necessary for sustained involvement.

There are other general conditions which are necessary to develop school/community collaboration:

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*Two excellent sources of help for people interested in school volunteer programs are *School Volunteers: What They Do, How They Do It* and *Organizing School Volunteer Programs* by Barbara Carter and Gloria Dapper. A good source book on youth projects is *New Roles for Youth in the School and Community* by the National Commission on Resources for Youth.

†Parker Palmer and Elden Jacobsen. *Action Research: A New Style of Politics in Education.* Boston: Institute for Responsive Education, 1974.

Access to information

Effective collaboration requires access to necessary information. That is a simple, self-evident statement, but very often citizen participation efforts flounder because the group does not have the information it needs, does not know what information is available or how to get it, or runs afoul of school officials or education agencies unwilling to provide information. A school council asked to assess school programs and propose alternatives needs a good deal of information. For example: What do the programs cost? What evidence from research or experience is there about the results of such programs? What are district and state requirments? What alternative programs have been tried in other places? What evidence is there about their effectiveness? A knowledge base of this kind is vital for constructive activity.

At another level, good information made available to the public is absolutely essential to insure that public discussion of school issues is an informed discussion. If collaboration means anything, it means increased public dialogue and debate about central educational choices. Only when such discussion is based on sound and solid facts will the level of public debate be raised. The stakes here are high because the quality of choices finally made will directly reflect the quality of discussion preceding those choices.

Provision for training and orientation

Parents and citizens asked to perform new roles need help — training for specific skills, information for decision-making, orientation to the task and the setting. Teachers and administrators also need training and orientation if they are to be effective in new relationships with parents and citizens. The kinds of training and orientation needed will vary, of course, according to the form of participation, the background of the participants, and the setting. Although the initial phase of an activity is crucial, the need for such support services can occur at any phase of development. Procedures for orientation and training can be formal or informal and they do not normally have to be long, complicated, or expensive. Sometimes a few short (two to four hour) workshops, well-planned and sharply-focused, can go a long way toward developing both the skills and confidence necessary for new undertakings.

Good staff leadership

"Volunteer" leadership is not enough. Successful efforts to form and maintain citizen organizations require some paid staff, staff that has a variety of skills and expertise. A new kind of citizen-community professionalism is beginning to emerge. These new professionals have skills of community organizing, fund-raising, public relations, and fact-finding and data analysis. Neither genius nor academic degrees are prerequisites, but skill, sensitivity, and time are.

Thoughtful attention to the full "action cycle" and to communication at all stages of that cycle

A group which establishes systematic procedures for carrying out tasks has a good chance of avoiding costly and frustrating wheel spinning. Any complete cycle of action involves planning, implementing or carrying out the task, and evaluating. The planning stage can be considered the most critical, since it summarizes all the action steps and builds in procedures for evaluation. During a planning stage, a group addresses a number of basic questions:

- Who should be involved and how?
- What is the problem or need?
- What are the goals and alternative goals?
- What is the best way to reach the goals (strategy)?
- What is needed to get the job done (money, personnel, information, time, etc.)?
- How will success be judged? What can be learned?

When these questions have been answered, the plan of action is clear and the standards for judging success established. Without such groundwork, goals can be taken for granted, valuable alternatives can be ignored, possible problems unseen, and the intended outcomes cloudy.

Groups can also fail to move to action by spending all their time deciding what to do without tackling a job or by running out of time, money, or commitment. A group may ignore the evaluation step and rely instead on personal judgments or feelings about what worked or did not work. In such situations (which can often be avoided by good planning), there is little movement or growth and minimal change or learning.

At every stage of this cycle, communication channels demand special attention. Planning must include identifying those who should be included and kept informed. These communication channels must be maintained throughout the activity, right through to the evaluation results of any single task or overall goals. When communication channels are weak, when some groups are left out, when information is incomplete or inaccurate, problems are sure to arise and valuable support can be lost.

Good planning and communication skills are at the heart of an effective organization. A group which has identified its planning or communication needs is in a good position to tap many of the resources commonly available – both useful publications and people with special competencies. Often local residents in business, industry, service agencies, or organizations have skills in planning or communication they are willing to share. Members of college and university faculties often provide services on an informal or short-term basis. When the need is clear, resources can generally be found.

The burden of this overview is clear. Serious efforts at school/community collaboration are not child's play. If program goals

aim to restructure decision-making processes, if both school people and community people are to move to new forms of interaction, certain conditions must be met. There is need for a receptive environment, for the development of skills in areas such as communication and planning, and for continuing support services to enhace the quality of the activity. Good collaboration requires time, energy, effort, and commitment. To ignore these requirements means underestimating both the real costs and the potential benefits for all participants — parents, administrators, teachers, community members — and, above all, students.

Future Directions

The years ahead are almost certain to bring more parent and citizen participation in school affairs. The varieties of participation will increase along with the quantity. The experiences of the past decade can provide a base for future directions, if we look at characteristics of current practice in the light of problems and potential.

In the Introduction, Joseph Featherstone identified two problem areas: the gulf between teacher groups and parent groups, and the danger of localized action out of touch with state and national developments. In reviewing the ten examples of current practice, we noted a concern for reform (rather than abolition) and an emphasis on changes in decision-making structures that point toward collaboration rather than confrontation. School/community efforts can be a mechanism for building alliances and coalitions. In addition, we pointed to the need for decentralization of decision-making. We observed that serious efforts to bring decisions close to home require careful examination of local, state, and federal contexts and close scrutiny of policy and practice at various governmental levels. With such safeguards, decentralization can avoid narrow self-interest and parochialism. In this context we suggest that local school councils hold great potential as one option for future directions in school/community activity.

School Councils

As the necessity for school/community collaboration becomes more and more apparent to school people and citizens alike, the local school building takes on special importance. Interests and energies of parents are most easily mobilized and sustained around the policies and practices of the schools their children attend. The final and most important impact of federal, state, town, or city forces affecting education is in the classroom and schoolhouse. This is where the work of administrators, teachers, other professionals, and parents touches the lives of children most directly. It is at this level that teachers, parents, and students can make a measurable contribution to educational decision-making. Studies show that the individual school is the most important unit for educational planning and change.

The school council is beginning to emerge as the dominant

mechanism for school/community collaboration. At least 3,000 such councils already exist. (The work of councils in Los Angeles and Louisville is described in Chapters 6 and 4.) Florida has mandated their creation; other states are considering legislation to encourage or require them. Many school districts are discussing taking steps to develop such councils.

The characteristics, duties, and effectiveness of existing councils vary widely. The typical size ranges from 5 to 50 members. Some members are elected; some appointed by the principal or school committee. Some councils have both elected and appointed members. Most have a majority of parents, but include teachers and a few students. Building principals are sometimes members, but most often serve as staff consultants or executive officers (as superintendents serve school committees). Most councils are primarily advisory groups, but some have specific decision-making authority delegated by the principal or school committee.

At this stage of development, patterns are not firmly fixed and this arena of action is open for imaginative directions. It is possible to propose some guidelines — suggestions about purposes and directions rather than prescriptions for a fixed line of action.

Suggested Guidelines for Local Councils

Type

Decisions about size, membership, function, and ways of working should be made by each school district through joint planning involving the school committee, the superintendent, other central office administrators, teachers and teacher organizations, parents, citizens, and students. Local conditions, needs, experience, and values are the best guides for deciding what kind of council plan, if any, should be tried.

Start-up

Initiative can come from school people or community people. Regardless of who takes the first step, joint planning is essential from the beginning. A plan for collaboration developed unilaterally by administrators is not likely to succeed any more than a plan developed by a parent group without genuine involvement of others who will be affected by the plan.

Members

Council members should be elected by a democratic process determined in the planning process. While a majority of members should be parents of children attending the school, councils should also include teachers and other school staff, community residents, and students. Even in elementary schools, the perspective of students — the "consumers" of programs — can be helpful.

Special efforts by all concerned are required to assure that the council is representative of diverse groups and interests in the community. Membership should represent different racial, ethnic,

cultural, and economic backgrounds, as well as differing political and social viewpoints. A council controlled by a single group or interest in a diverse community cannot be an effective vehicle for collaboration.

Other groups

Existing parent groups should play an important role in developing plans for a new council. It is important to coordinate such groups as PTSA, Title I, or bilingual advisory committees. Having a school council does not eliminate the need for other groups. An existing PTSA, for example, can become an arm of a school council or a PTSA group may wish to expand its function to become a school council.

Roles and responsibilities

A school council without clear and significant functions and areas of authority will be an exercise in futility and frustration for all concerned.

In some cases, council functions are limited to a few specific areas (such as annual assessment). In others, councils perform multiple and broad duties. The most common areas of work include:

- assessing community and student needs, identifying facility needs;
- identifying goals and priorities for the school; setting school budget priorities;
- improving community support for the school; investigating student or parent complaints or problems; mobilizing school and community response to crises;
- selecting (or participating in the selection of) the principal; evaluating the principal;
- participating in the selection of teachers and other staff; evaluating or assisting in staff evaluation;
- reviewing and approving new school programs, curricula, and student activities;
- evaluating extra-curricular activities;
- coordinating volunteer programs and other programs to provide parent/community assistance to the school;
- communicating school problems and needs to area or district councils and/or the school committee.

Principal

A cooperative and mutually supportive relationship between the school council and the school principal is of special importance. The principal is in a key position to aid or block the development of an effective council. Considerable experience shows that the professionalism and leadership of a principal can be enhanced and not jeopardized or reduced because of the existence of such an organization.

Training

The members of a school council and the principal need assistance, information, orientation, and planning for the council to have a fair

chance of success. Lack of access to information about school policies, budgets, problems, and lack of training in organizing a group is the single major cause of failure. Such support need not cost much money, neither is much money required for the operation of a council. But some financial support is necessary to cover costs of planning and training workshops, duplication of materials and newsletters, and other means of communication with all members of the school community.

Evaluation

A school committee or board should see to it that each school council authorized in its district is evaluated at least once a year and that each council reports annually on its work, achievements, and problems. The basis for such evaluation must be included in the original design of the council so that standards for judging success are understood and agreed upon.

By-Laws

An effective council needs written rules for its operation — developed jointly with and approved by the school board. The functions and limitations of the council's work should be clear and officially recognized. By-laws should include the following elements:

Article I: Name of Organization
Article II: Purposes
Article III: Functions and Limitations of Authority
Article IV: Membership
- A. Definitions
- B. Categories and numbers of representatives
- C. Methods and rules of selection; voting procedures; monitoring
- D. Terms of office
- E. Voting rights of members
- F. Termination of membership
- G. Vacancies

Article V: Officers and their duties
Article VI: Executive Committee (if any) — membership and duties
Article VII: Committees
Article VIII: Meetings (frequency and location)

One of the most importance problems reported by councils in different parts of the country is apathy. Experience and research indicate that community apathy is often the result of feelings of powerlessness and cynicism, the feeling "why should I get involved — it won't make any difference." The best remedy for apathy is to make sure that councils have clear and important duties, that they are listened to, taken seriously, and given adequate support. Perhaps most important of all is the need for all parties to enter into the planning and development of a school council with a spirit of commitment to increased collaboration and a willingness to help make the plan work.

If we have read the signs correctly, local school councils are emerging as a major form of citizen activity in schools. We have suggested some reasons why the movement deserves both attention and support. Local councils cannot, of course, address all major issues of education pressing for attention at this time. They do hold a potential for constructive and creative citizen action. Councils offer one concrete way to bridge the "apathy-activism" gap by reducing non-involvment and harnessing the talents of citizens ready and willing to act.

Conclusion

Schools Where Parents Make A Difference is based on three years of study and work by the Institute for Responsive Education. I.R.E. is a national organization, created by its president Don Davies in 1973. It began in New Haven and in 1974 moved to Boston where it is housed in the Department of System Development and Adaptation, School of Education, Boston University. I.R.E. is devoted to studying and assisting the process of citizen participation in educational decision making.

I.R.E. conducts projects and workshops, provides advice and assistance to schools and citizen organizations, and publishes reports of its various projects as well as a quarterly journal, *Citizen Action in Education.* Among its activities are three recent study projects:

In September, 1976, I.R.E. initiated three major projects to increase the citizen voice in educational decision making. The first of these is a two-year project funded by the New World Foundation in New York City to encourage changes in the industrial model of collective bargaining used in most school systems. Chaired by Professor Seymour Sarason of Yale University, this study is an extension of an earlier I.R.E. study which resulted in a report titled *The Community at the Bargaining Table.*

I.R.E. recognizes and respects the rights of teachers to organize and bargain with school management. But I.R.E. also feels strongly that the community and parents must not be left out of decisions which affect the education of their children. It is in the best interests of all — the public, school people, and students — to encourage discussion and debate on the nature of the bargaining process and ways to improve it.

The study will identify communities where work is being done to alter and improve the bargaining process and to identify research, ideas, and literature on the topic. An information clearinghouse will allow access to information on bargaining practices for all interested parents, school people, scholars, teacher groups, and students.

I.R.E. is providing support for three local projects in altering bargaining through technical assistance, ideas, materials, and information. Two of the projects are in California under the leadership of the California League of Women Voters. Local Leagues of Women Voters are studying and assessing the implementation of the Rodda Act to determine the effectiveness of this "sunshine" law in allowing the community information and input into bargaining. The other project is in New York City, organized by the Public Education Association. The aim of the New York project is to increase access to the bargaining process to parents,

students, the public, and school-level management interests.

The second project is a two-year study titled "Citizen Organizations: A Study in Educational Decision Making," funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. This project includes an inventory of citizen activity throughout the United States, with particular emphasis on school community councils and advisory groups; establishment of an information clearinghouse; and support for five local projects where school/community council activity flourishes. Two of the sites for project study will be San Diego and the Boston area, and the other three will be determined by the results of the initial inventory of activity. The goal of the study is to focus attention on school/community councils as important mechanisms for citizen participation and to determine what makes effective councils.

The largest and most comprehensive of I.R.E.'s coming activities is a three year study of citizen organizations funded by the National Institute of Education, titled "Citizen Organizations: A Study of Citizen Participation in Educational Decision-Making." I.R.E. will look for trends and developments and identify promising and effective citizen organizations across the country. Marilyn Gittell, a well-known political scientist and author who is a research consultant for the project, will visit many cities with Don Davies, the Principal Investigator, to identify people and groups involved in school/community collaboration activities.

Concurrently with this investigation, I.R.E. will conduct a literature review and publish a bibliography.

During the second year I.R.E. will seek to discover what factors make urban citizen organizations effective, and ways in which they organize, exchange information, and communicate with other organizations through informal networks.

I.R.E. hopes that readers of *Schools Where Parents Make A Difference* will respond to the book — tell us what they know about citizen participation and cases where parents, students, and others have made contributions to the health of their schools and communities. Please write to us with suggestions and comments, or for a list of other I.R.E. publications, at:

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Schools Where Parents Make A Difference, edited by Don Davies, is a collection of stories about schools in all parts of the country written by education writers and journalists. These schools are as far apart as Boston and Los Angeles, from urban schools in Minneapolis to schools on Indian reservations to a "dream school" in California. What they have in common are concerned, involved parents who support, help operate, and shape their schools to meet the special needs of their own communities and children.

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